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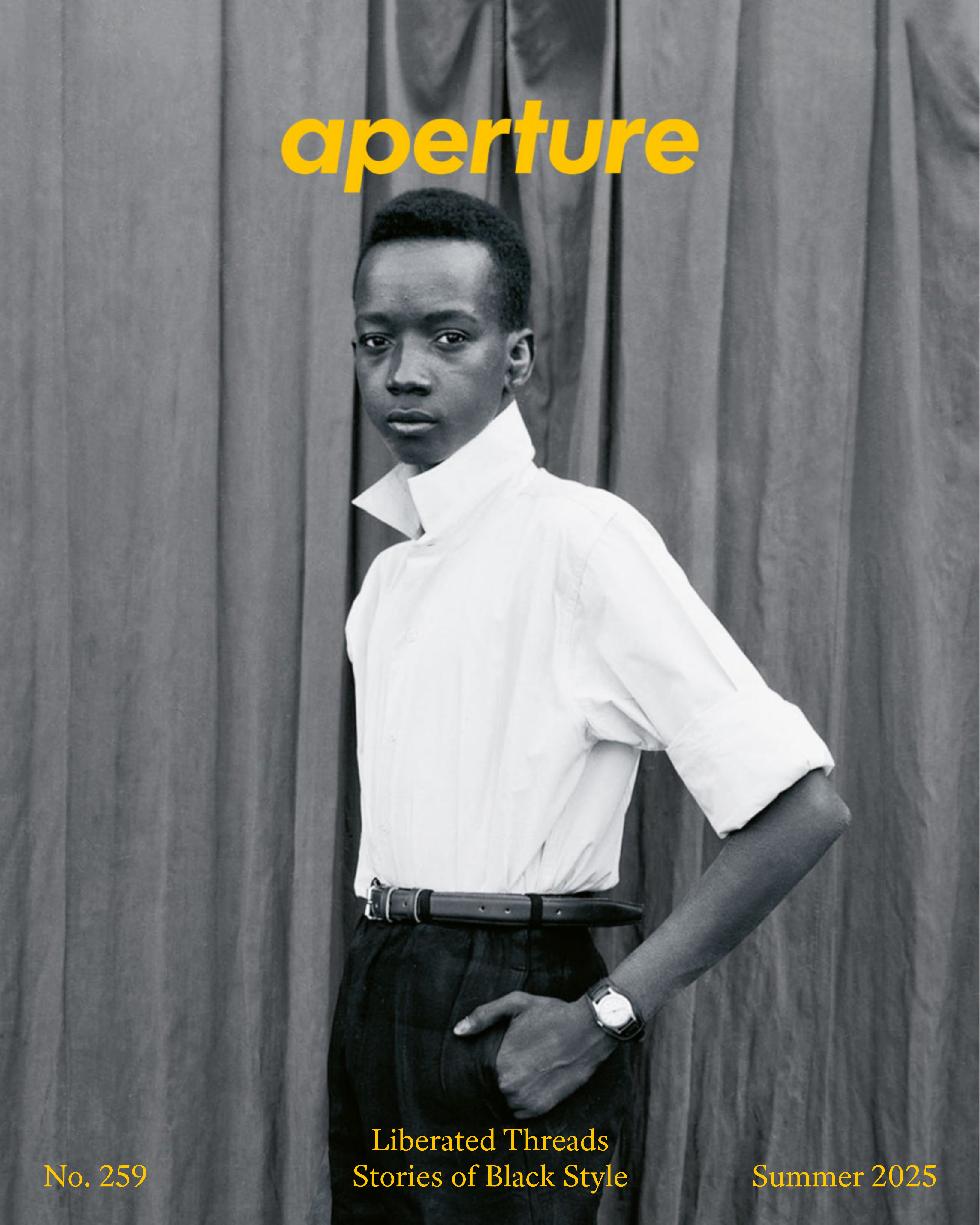
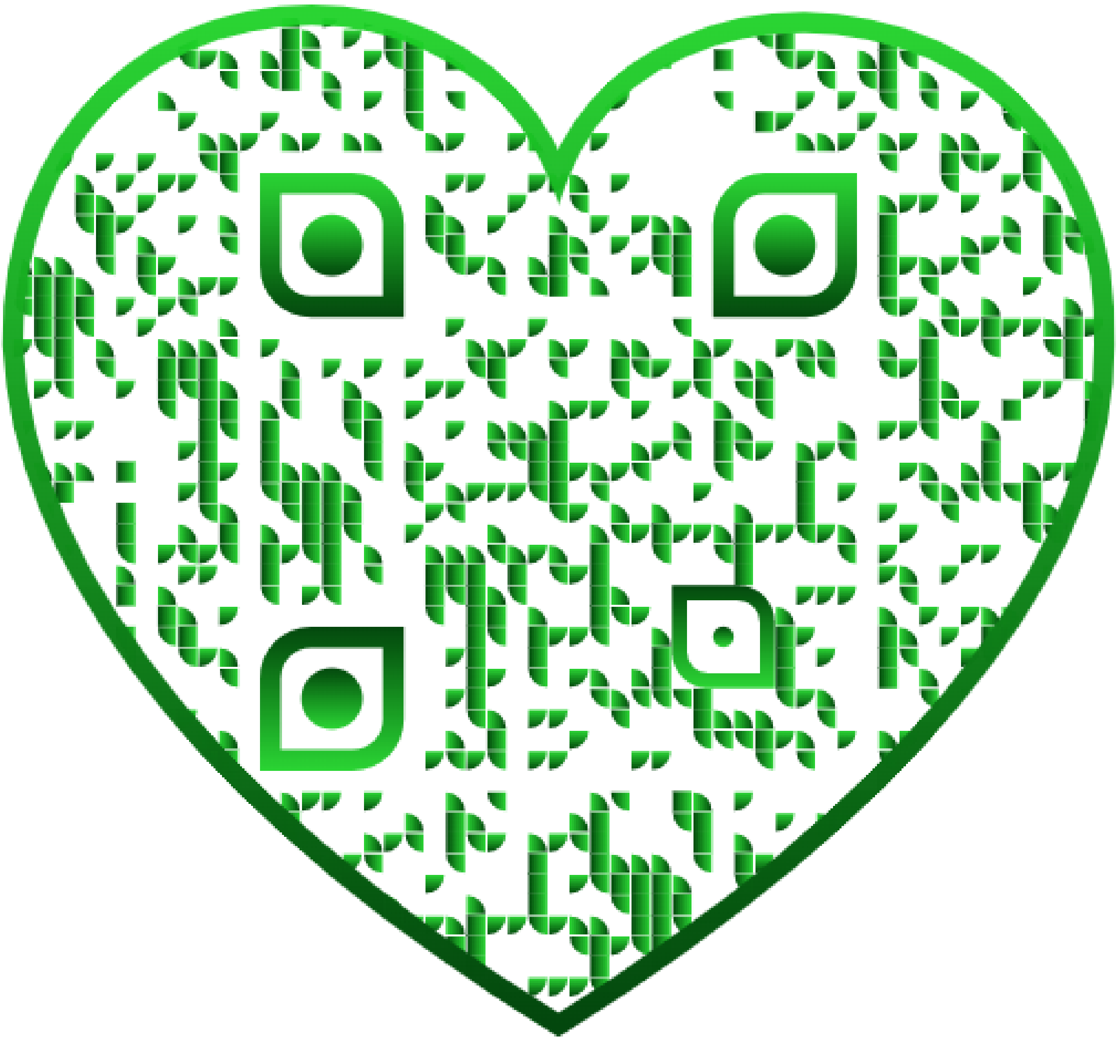


Liberated Threads
Stories of Black Style

No. 259

Summer 2025



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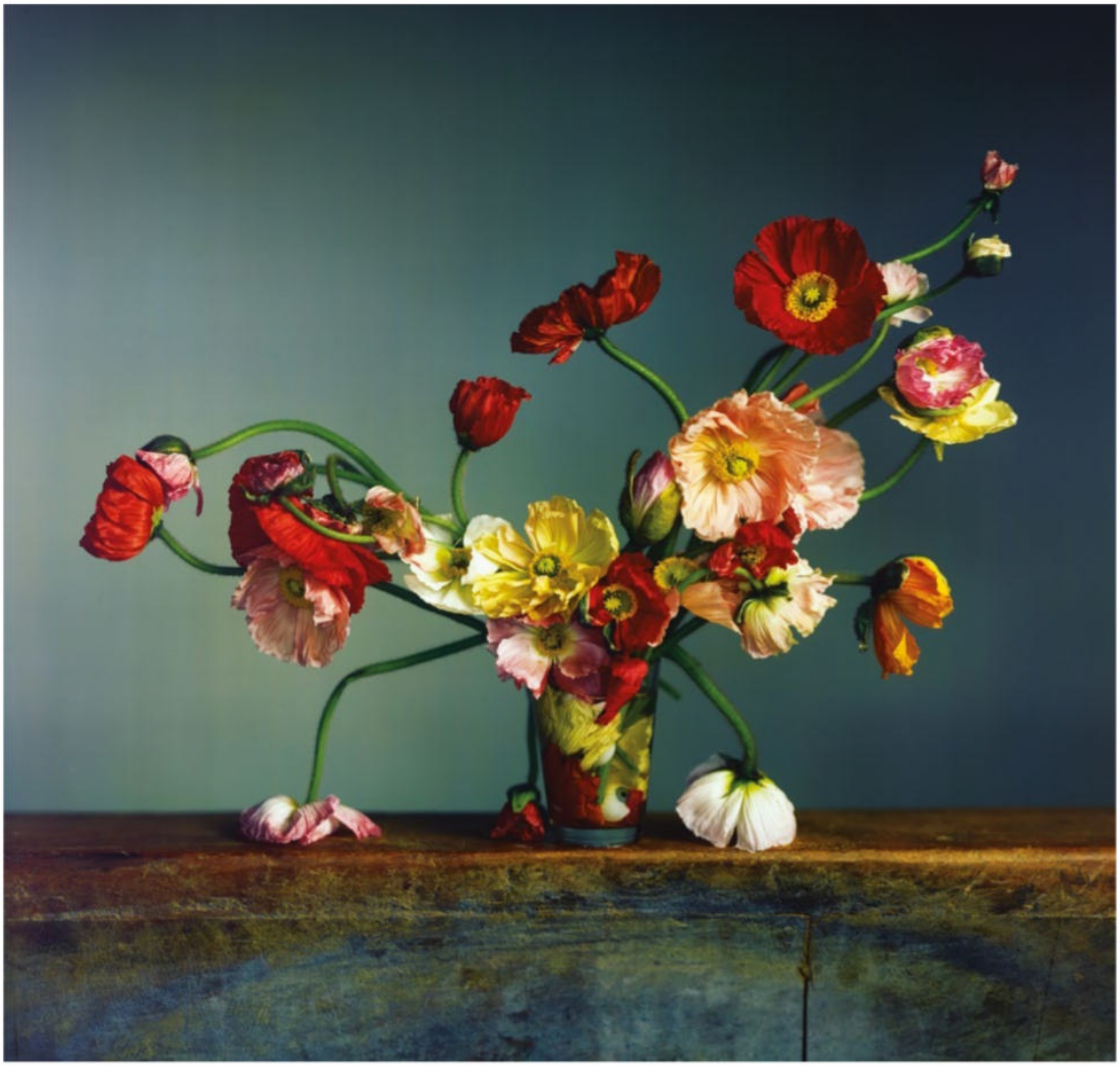

RICHARD LEAROYD, *Untitled poppies*, 2025, unique Ilfochrome photograph

Heinrich Riebesehl, *Menschen Im Fahrstuhl, 20.11.1969* [People in the Elevator, 20.11.1969], 1969. Kicken Berlin © Heinrich Riebesehl, by SIAE 2025

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Liberated Threads
Summer 2025

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Front cover:
Seydou Keïta,
***Untitled* (detail), 1952/55**
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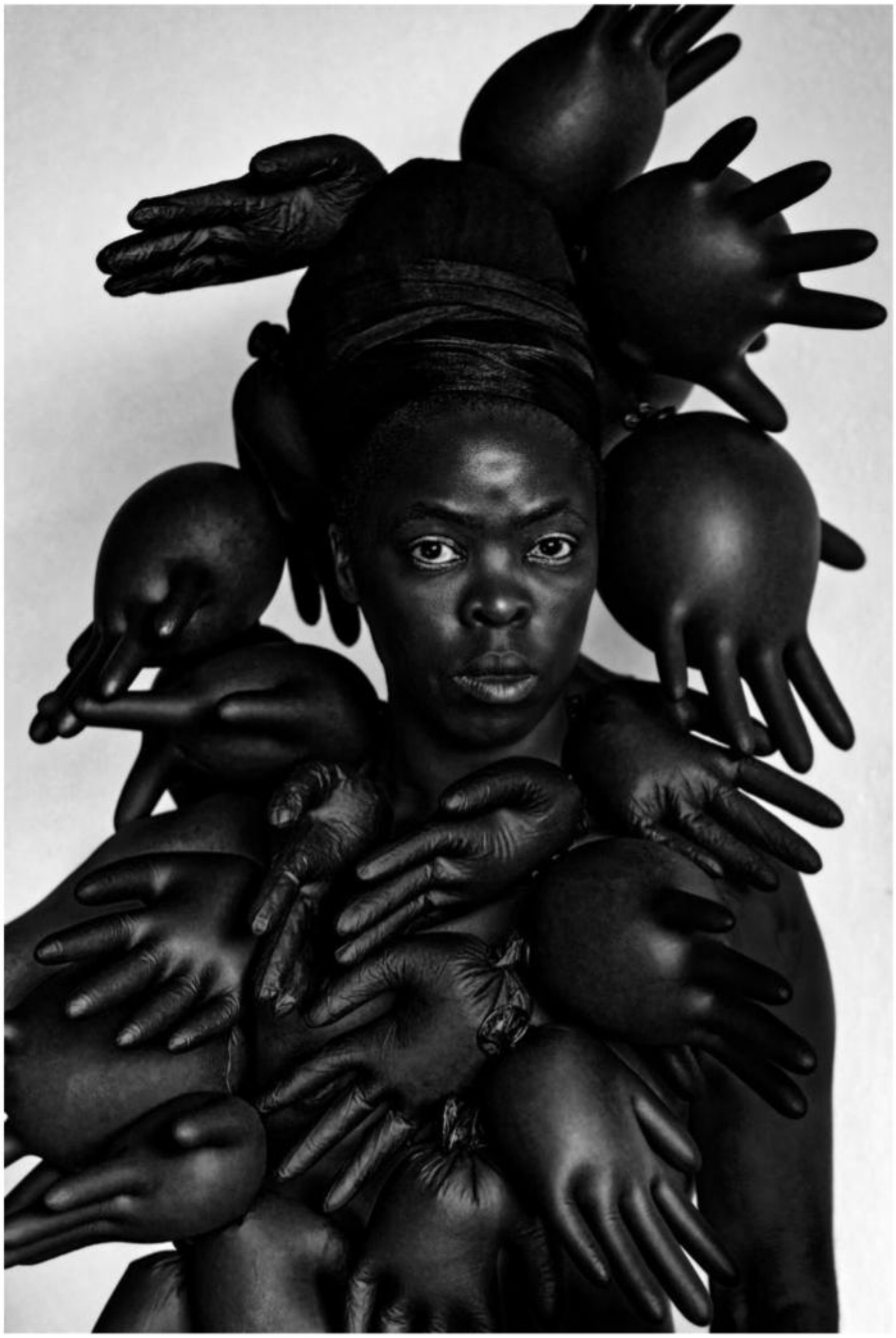

Zanele Muholi, *Phila I, Parktown*, 2016, edition of 8 + 2 artist's proofs. Courtesy of Southern Guild and Yancey Richardson. © Zanele Muholi.

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Contributors

TANISHA C. FORD ("Liberated Threads," page 36) is a Harlem-based writer, researcher, and a professor of history at The Graduate Center at the City University of New York. As the guest editor of this issue, Ford has curated a range of portfolios, essays, and interviews exploring how contemporary image makers are remixing and reimagining what she terms "soul style"—a worldwide movement that fused fashion and self-expression with Black freedom in the 1960s and 1970s, and the subject of her book *Liberated Threads: Black Women, Style, and the Global Politics of Soul* (2015), from which this issue takes its title. Ford's other books include *Kwame Brathwaite: Black Is Beautiful* (Aperture, 2019) and *Our Secret Society: Mollie Moon and the Glamour, Money, and Power Behind the Civil Rights Movement* (2023). "I wanted to bring together artists who see style as a way to ask questions about embodiment, pleasure, and political consciousness," says Ford of guest editing the issue. "I hope readers find much to discover in their work, which I think exemplifies the ingenuity and capaciousness of the Black imagination."

AMY DUBOIS BARNETT ("Turning the Page," page 100) is a writer, editor, and media executive. The former editor in chief of *Teen People* and *Ebony* magazines, Barnett has held senior leadership positions at Paramount, Hearst, Disney, and Time Inc., and is the author of *Get Yours!: How to Have Everything You Ever Dreamed of and More* (2007), which was nominated for an NAACP Image Award. Her debut novel, *If I Ruled the World*, will be published in January 2026. In this issue, Barnett reflects on her time editing *Honey*, a short-lived but epochal New York–based magazine for and by Black women.

KOBBY ANKOMAH GRAHAM ("Living Archive," page 44) is a writer, DJ, lecturer, and cultural researcher who lives in Accra. His PhD research dissects why alternative musicians in Ghana channel community into their artistry. Graham's writing previously appeared in *Aperture*'s Fall 2023 issue on Accra, in which he delved into the preservation of Ghanaian history in local photographic archives and repositories. In this issue, he revisits the portraiture of the Malian photographer Seydou Keïta. "It's one thing to admire a legend from afar and another to write something that honors them," he said of this assignment. "No pressure at all."

FATIMA JAMAL ("There Are New Suns," page 104) is a writer, model, and "anti-disciplinary" artist based in Harlem. She has walked several runways, appeared in Ryan Murphy's television series *Pose* and Tourmaline's *Atlantic Is a Sea of Bones* (2017), and is currently walking the halls of Union Theological Seminary pursuing her Master of Divinity. A maker of images and words as prayer, Jamal is the writer and director of the ongoing documentary project *No Fats, No Femmes*. In this issue, she appears in conversation with the artist Ja'Tovia Gary to discuss how they've each reckoned with selfhood, history, and the politics of visibility in their art.

SOLANGE KNOWLES ("The Director," page 72) is an American singer, songwriter, and actress. Her albums include *When I Get Home* (2019) and *A Seat at the Table* (2016), whose lead single, "Cranes in the Sky," won the Grammy for Best R&B Performance. Knowles is the founder of Saint Heron, a creative agency that amplifies underrepresented voices and, in 2022, she became the first Black woman to compose music for the New York City Ballet. For this issue, Knowles interviews Melina Matsoukas about her visionary career spanning Hollywood, fashion, music, and more.

GAZELLE MBA ("London Calling," page 56) is a Nigerian writer and researcher based in Lagos. Her work has appeared in the *British Journal of Photography*, *Dazed*, *Frieze*, the *London Review of Books*, and *The World of Interiors*. She publishes the newsletter *Good Intentions* and is currently working on a nonfiction book about Nigerian nostalgia for which she received the RCA Writing Prize. Here, Mba writes on photographer Liz Johnson Artur's collaborations with Feben and other London-based designers.

DARNELL L. MOORE ("Proof of Life," page 124) is a writer and activist based in Los Angeles. In 2018, Moore published *No Ashes in the Fire: Coming of Age Black and Free in America*, an acclaimed memoir that covers his tumultuous upbringing as a queer man growing up in Camden, New Jersey, and Philadelphia, and his role as a key figure of the Black Lives Matter movement. In these pages, Moore speaks with his partner, the stylist Yashua Simmons, about the evolution of his eye and the role collaboration and community play in his work.

MADISON MOORE ("Hair Stories," page 64) is a cultural critic, DJ, and assistant professor of modern culture and media at Brown University. His first book, *Fabulous: The Rise of the Beautiful Eccentric* (2018), considers the aesthetics and political dimensions of fabulousness as embodied by such cultural rebels as Prince, Grace Jones, and the ballroom pioneer Lasseindra Ninja. He is currently at work on a second book, *NIGHT FEVER*, about Black queer nightlife. In this issue, moore introduces a portfolio by the nonpareil hairstylist Nikki Nelms.

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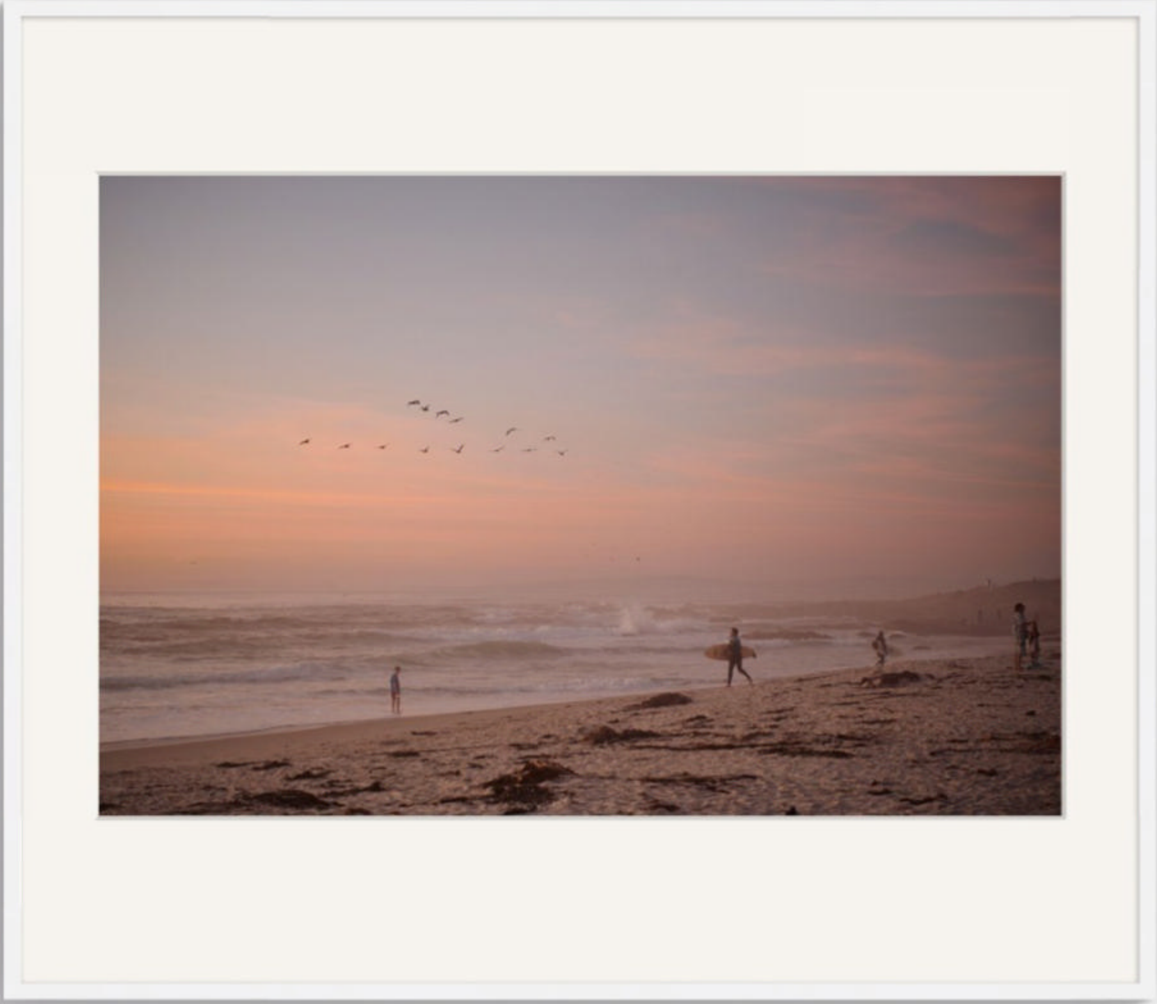

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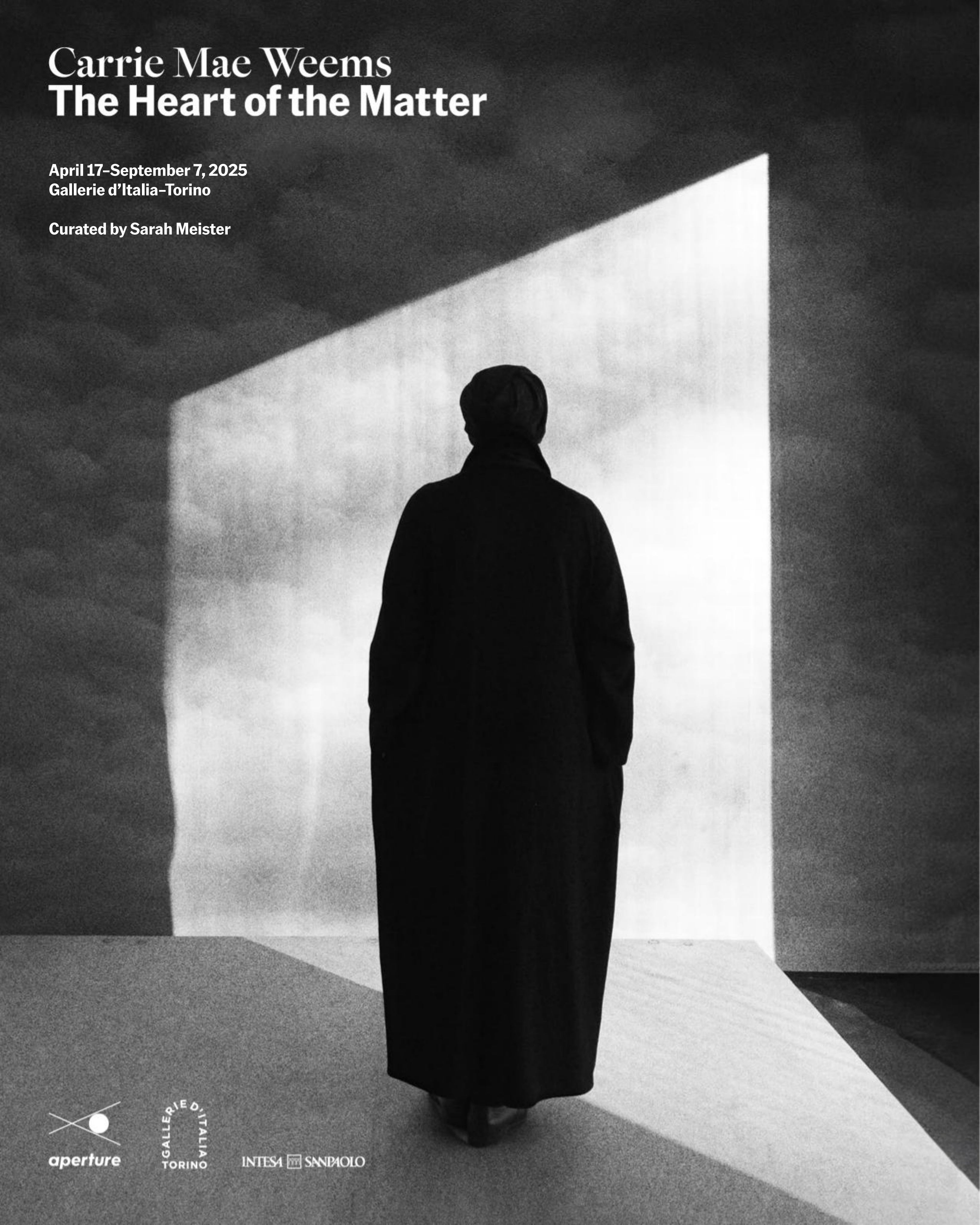

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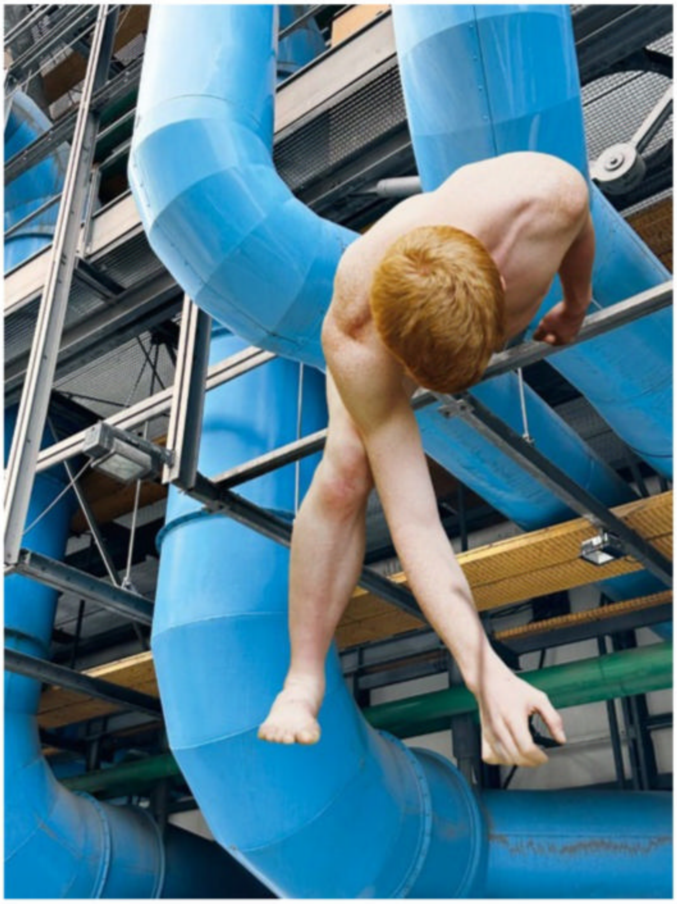
Agenda
Exhibitions to See

Wolfgang Tillmans

The name Wolfgang Tillmans more readily evokes nightclubs and day-long raves of the sort he chronicled in the 1990s than the hushed environs of a library. But this summer, the German photographer is taking over the *bibliothèque* of the Centre Pompidou, which will go dark in September for a five-year renovation. Given carte blanche, the artist will bring together photographs, videos, music, text, and archival material to transform the mostly empty, sixty-five-thousand-square-foot Public Information Library into a node of epistemological inquiry and Tillmans-esque togetherness.

Wolfgang Tillmans: Rien ne nous y préparait – Tout nous y préparait (Nothing prepared us for it – Everything prepared us for it) at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, June 13–September 22, 2025



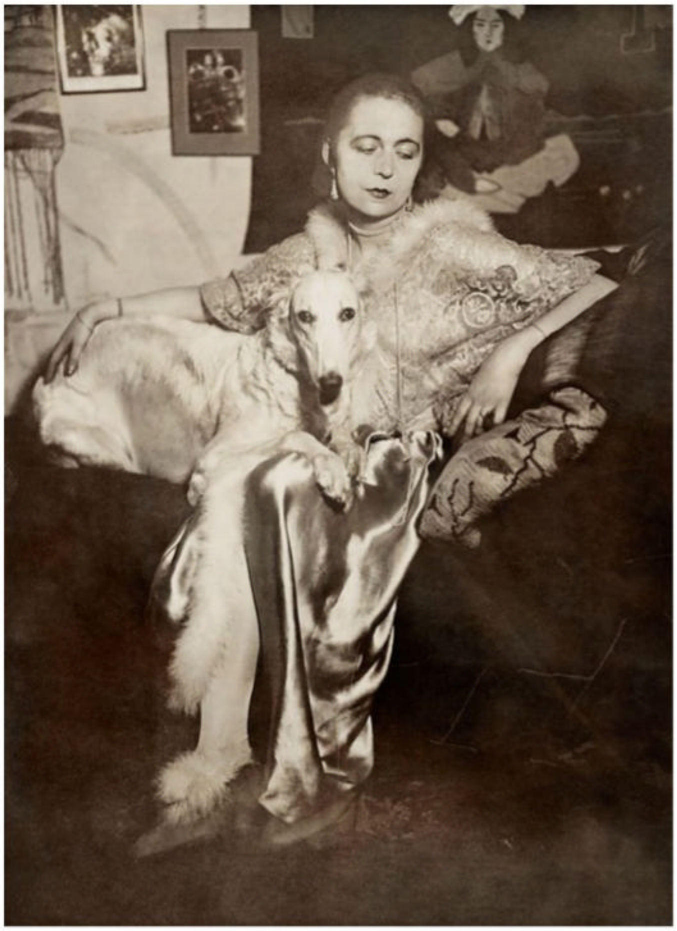
Wolfgang Tillmans, *Pompidou poster study*, 2024
Courtesy the artist; David Zwirner; Galerie Buchholz, Berlin/Cologne; and Maureen Paley, London

Stan Douglas, *Exodus, 1975*, 2012
Courtesy the artist and Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College

Stan Douglas

Stan Douglas produces painstakingly composed "speculative histories" that trouble the boundaries between history, fiction, and myth, using the supposed objectivity of the camera as a starting point. *Ghostlight*, his first United States retrospective in over twenty years, will draw out themes of collective memory and rupture in works that include a new multichannel video installation reimagining D. W. Griffith's 1915 silent epic, *The Birth of a Nation*. As Douglas once said, "Maybe by breaking the rules of realism in photography—the rules of this automatic, perspectival image—we can get back to a trace of the humanity of looking."

Stan Douglas: Ghostlight at the Hessel Museum of Art at Bard College, Annandale-On-Hudson, New York, June 21–November 20, 2025



Marta Astfalck-Vietz, ***Untitled*** **(Self-portrait), 1927**
© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn

Marta Astfalck-Vietz

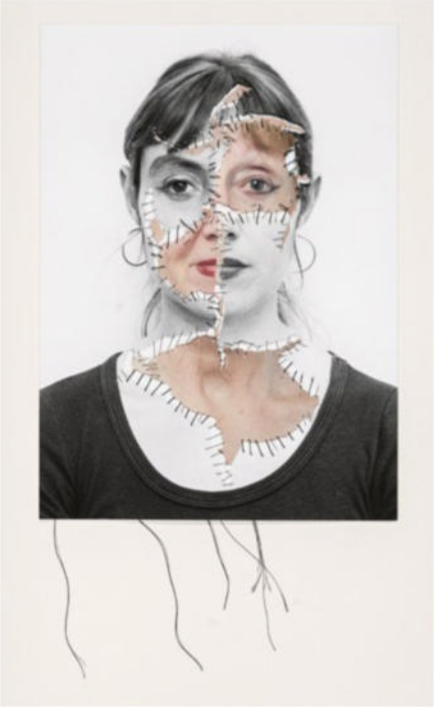
Marta Astfalck-Vietz's contributions to photography's story may not be as familiar as that of her peers working in Germany in the vital, if imperiled, cultural scene of the 1920s. One reason is that Astfalck-Vietz's archive was partially destroyed during the bombing of Berlin in World War II. What survived—and have recently been restored—are dreamy, surreal pictures, often embracing formal experimentation, ranging from portraits, to nudes, to performative self-portraits that foreshadow modes of art making that would become dominant in the 1970s.

Marta Astfalck-Vietz: Staging the Self at the Berlinische Galerie Museum of Modern Art, Berlin, July 11–October 13, 2025

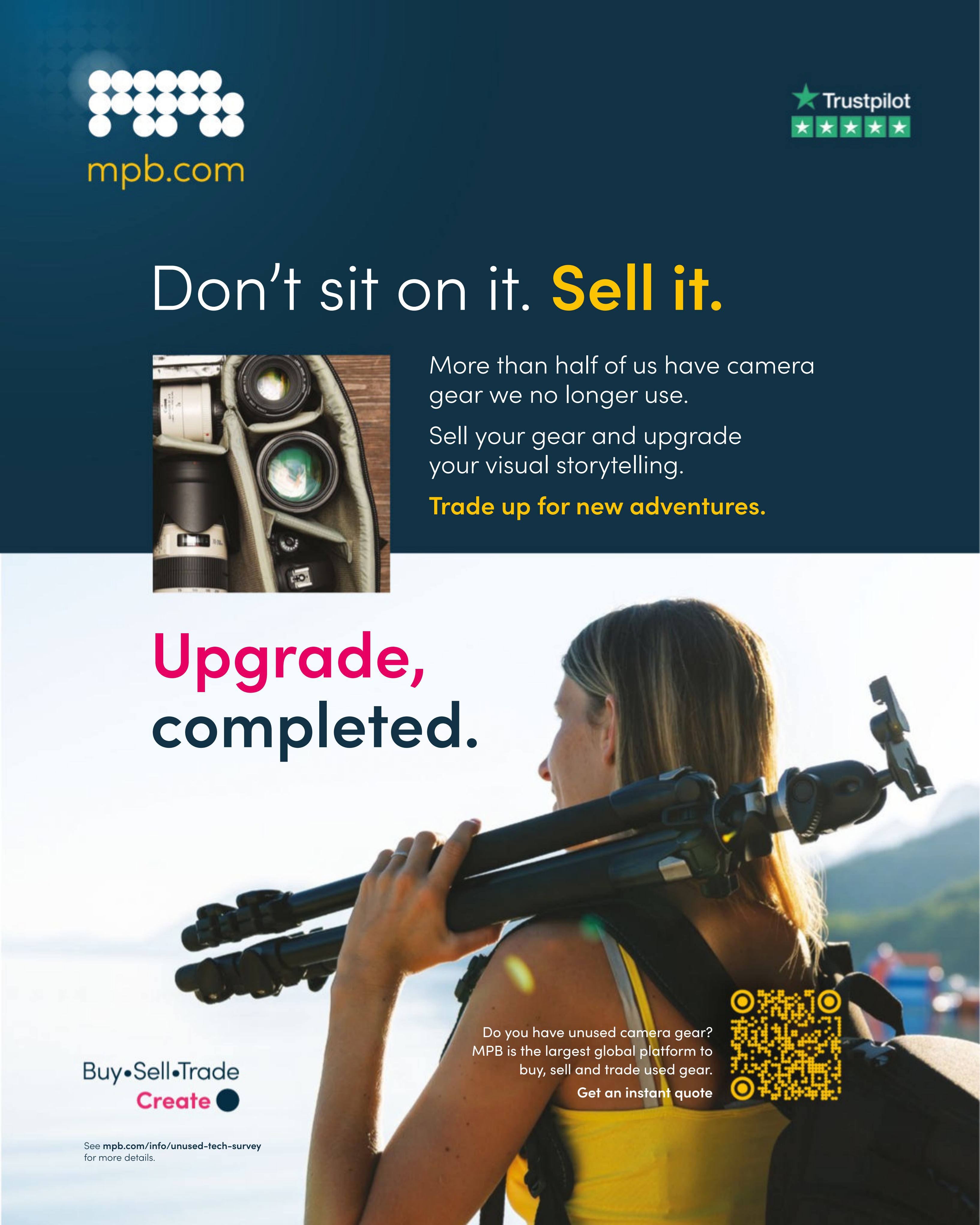
Annegret Soltau

For more than six decades, the German artist Annegret Soltau has sought to exceed the strictures of the self through the visceral manipulation of images. Her hallmark is the use of black thread; she stitches representations of her own body and that of other women into photo collages that delve into themes of motherhood, pregnancy, and aging. Soltau, a product of the feminist movement, is now having her first retrospective—an opportunity for audiences to encounter remarkable multimedia work by an artist decidedly unbound by aesthetic and social conventions.

Uncensored: Annegret Soltau–A Retrospective at the Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main, May 8–August 17, 2025



Annegret Soltau, ***With Myself*****, 1975/2022**
© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn



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Dispatches

A new festival in Baghdad hopes to rebuild the Iraqi capital's artistic community following decades of war.

Dalia Al-Dujaili

Iraq's capital has endured waves of violence, from civil unrest to foreign invasions, leaving little room for arts infrastructure. But the launch of Baghdad Photo Week, the country's first photography festival, marks a notable turning point. Organized by the photographer Aymen Al-Ameri and his partner Meena Alyassin, who also cofounded the Iraqi arts magazine *Henna*, the event took place last December at The Gallery, a commercial art space in Baghdad.

The festival's theme, "Forgotten," paid tribute to two pioneering Iraqi photographers of the past, Nadhim Ramzi and Hadi Al-Najjar—key figures, alongside Latif al-Ani, in establishing the medium in the country. Much of the photography on view carried an aesthetic shaped by conflict and melancholy. Al-Ameri, Amir Hazim, and Alhassan Jamal Aldeen each capture daily life in high-contrast black and white, depicting ecological pollution, antiestablishment protestors, and the month of Muharram, the start of the Islamic New Year when

المرحوم مطر طالب علي الاسدي
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Page 14:
Claudia Willmitzer, *light source of a vehicle headlight spot at the desert of Dasht e lut, Iran*, 2014

Page 15:
Wisam Mutwak, *Holy soil*, 2023

This page, top:
Aline Deschamps, *Two friends hold arms and walk around the fairy amusement park*, 2022

This page, bottom:
Aymen Al-Ameri, from the series *Halves*, 2012–23

The need for a communal space to share images has become crucial.

Shias mourn Imam Ali, whose face is plastered on every street corner.

The program aimed to foster collaboration between diasporic Iraqis, image makers from throughout the country, and international photographers such as Charles Thiefaine, who is based in Paris and has made work about the massive 2019 protests in the capital that left hundreds dead, the subject of his project *Tahrir Disobedience*. Another body of his work, *Ala Allah* (On God), offers a quieter, warmer portrayal of daily life in Iraq—a more humanizing view than typically seen abroad.

The wide accessibility of photography, which requires little more than a smartphone, has accelerated its growth in Baghdad. With more photographers emerging, the need for a communal space to share images has become crucial. Al-Ameri, the festival organizer, is committed to working with photographers to develop a diverse range of projects. "We have many good Iraqi photographers, but most of the pictures are of the marshes and Karbala," he told me, referring to Iraq's southern marshlands and the Shia pilgrimage city. "We need to see more exhibitions. We don't have many galleries, and most photographers are stuck in the same cycle."

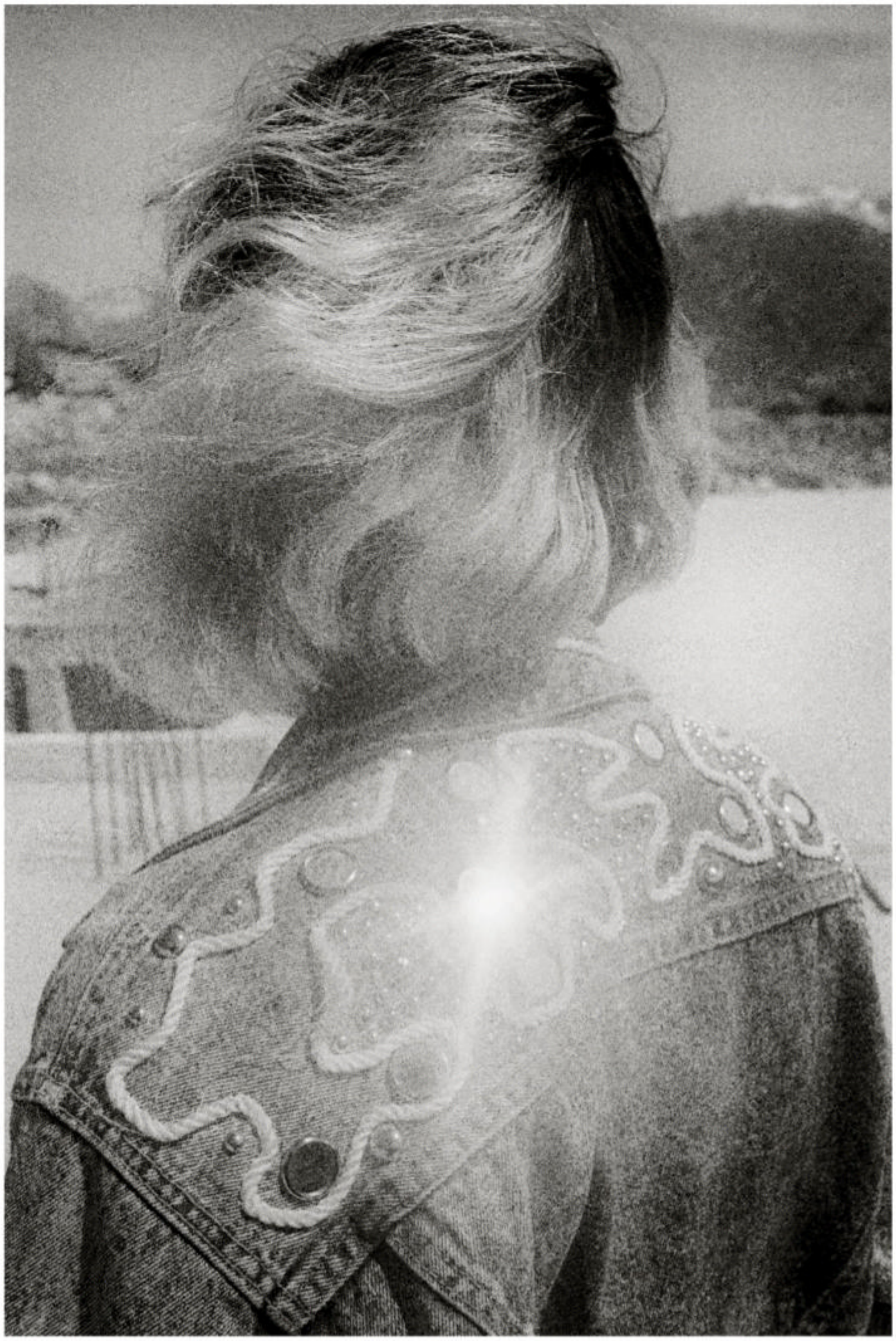
Documentary photography remains dominant, shaped by heavy international coverage of wars in Iraq. Abdullah Dhiaa Al-Deen's work is notable for capturing pivotal political moments and social issues with striking honesty. Professional photography in Iraq often prioritizes income potential over artistry, reflecting the country's high unemployment rates. Bearing witness to decades of tragedy has been central, but now, with the country's relative stability and recent urban development, visual narratives are evolving.

Coming to Iraq for the first time as a war correspondent in 2015, Thiefaine noted that many international journalists reproduced similar imagery. "I started to realize there was a big gap between what international photographers show and the lived experience," he said. Befriending Iraqi youth, Thiefaine noticed that people were very open to being photographed. "Even during the protest, people wanted to show what they have in mind as a society. They were proud of what they were trying to do. I try to stay far from the imagery of violence in my personal work."

Thiefaine believes that although Western journalism has contributed to shaping Iraq's maligned global image, the "political situation is changing very fast, which brings about new representation," pointing to different subcultures, queer culture, and how the festival itself aimed to show diverse perspectives. With Iraq frequently cited as one of the world's fastest-warming nations, environmental concerns also drove projects on view, such as Tamara Abdul Hadi's pictures of the iconic marshes and the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, as well as Emily Garthwaite's photographs of Kurdistan's biodiverse landscapes and minority communities, including Yazidis, Zoroastrians, and Bahá'ís.

Female representation in Iraqi photography is growing, albeit slowly. Initiatives such as Iraqi Female Photographers, founded by Ishtar Obaid, spotlight women, including Asmaa Turki,

Paul Hennebelle, from the series *Brown Eyes and Sand*, 2016–21



Opposite:
Tamara Abdul Hadi, *Best friends in Chabayish*, 2018

This page:
Charles Thiefaine, *Ala Allah, Mosul, Iraq*, 2018

Saba Kareem, and Tiba Sadeq. Turki's work ranges from young ballerinas in Baghdad to serene abaya embroidery in Najaf, vitalizing traditional themes with quiet beauty. Kareem's images of the marshes and pilgrimages add to this expanding repertoire.

Al-Ameri organized Baghdad Photo Week with minimal funding—an impressive and steadfast effort emblematic of the Iraqi attitude to life. "*Habibi*, send me photos right now, let's talk tonight," he recalls saying to friends just months before the festival. "To deal with Iraqis is not easy," he added. "Everything is *al Allah* [with God]," a phrase symbolizing a relaxed approach to deadlines. Creative problem-solving became vital for handling damaged prints and mismatched frames. Censorship presents another challenge. Political content, nudity, and drug-related themes are taboo. Social media offers some freedom, but constraints still limit expression. Despite Baghdad Photo Week's groundbreaking success, significant obstacles remain. The country's cultural infrastructure is underdeveloped, with minimal arts education, scant media coverage, and few exhibition spaces. Yet Baghdad Photo Week highlighted not only Iraq's wealth of talent but also its need to rebuild an artistic community and, after decades of relentless conflict, reimagine its global image.

Dalia Al-Dujaili is the online editor of the *British Journal of Photography* and the author of *Babylon, Albion: A Personal History of Myth and Migration* (2025).

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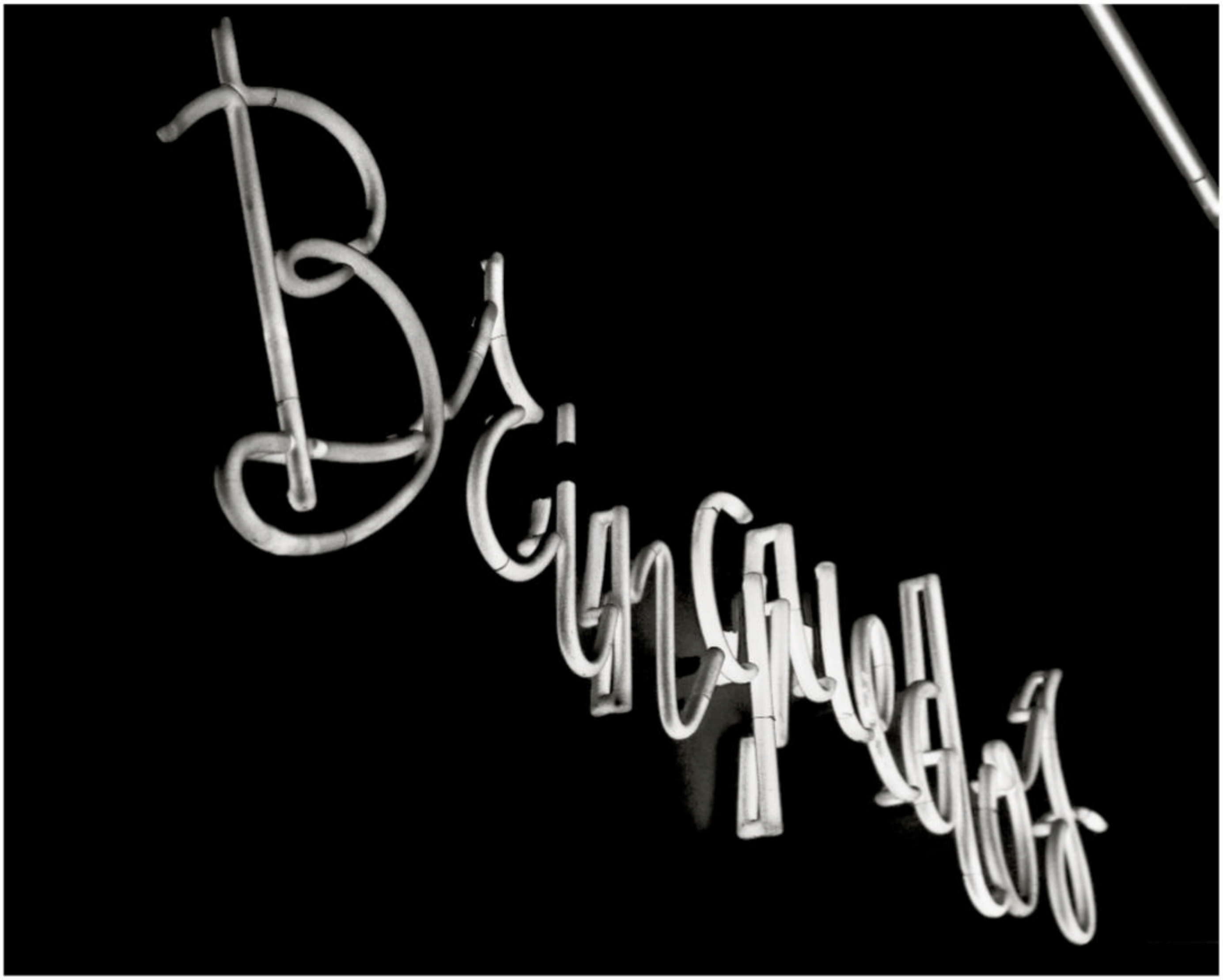
Redux

James Welling's *Light Sources* remains an essential and slyly mysterious study of photography's raw material.

Robert Slifkin

Photography is, etymologically speaking, light writing. The title of William Henry Fox Talbot's landmark book *The Pencil of Nature* (1844–46) boldly announced the medium's capacity to automatically delineate the world, making it, as Henry David Thoreau, another early theorist of the medium, put it, nature's amanuensis.

But the *graphism* of the photograph is paradoxical: Its apparently immediate transcription of the world is mute and largely indeterminate. We as viewers may have a sense of *what* an individual photograph depicts, but to ascertain what it *means* entails situating the image within a larger context, such as a personal narrative or a historical account. Books such as *The Pencil of Nature*—and every photobook since—employ various techniques to address this underlying illegibility, whether through textual supplements of essays and captions or, more



fundamentally, in the organization and sequence of images on the page.

James Welling's photobook *Light Sources*, first published by Imschoot, Uitgevers in 1996 and reissued in an expanded version in 2010 by Steidl/MACK, contains hardly any words beyond the title and a concise list of each photograph's manifest subject at the back of the book. When writing does appear in the photographs—as in the volume's original cover image, a cursive neon sign shot from an angle that projects letters of the word *brinquedos* ("toys" in Portuguese) against a pitch-black sky in Lisbon—it is almost indecipherable and nearly abstract. We're presented with a series of black-and-white photographs that often include a literal light source, such as a naked incandescent bulb radiating a halo against a bare white wall (the first image in the 1996 book), or the sun, which appears in the stunning opener of the revised edition, as seen through the tentacular branches of a tree in Meriden, Connecticut, its intense light registered against a white sky only through its corroding overexposure on the tree's blooms. By aiming his camera directly at a light source, Welling turned an established photography gaffe into both a sly technical coup and a conceptual organizing principle.

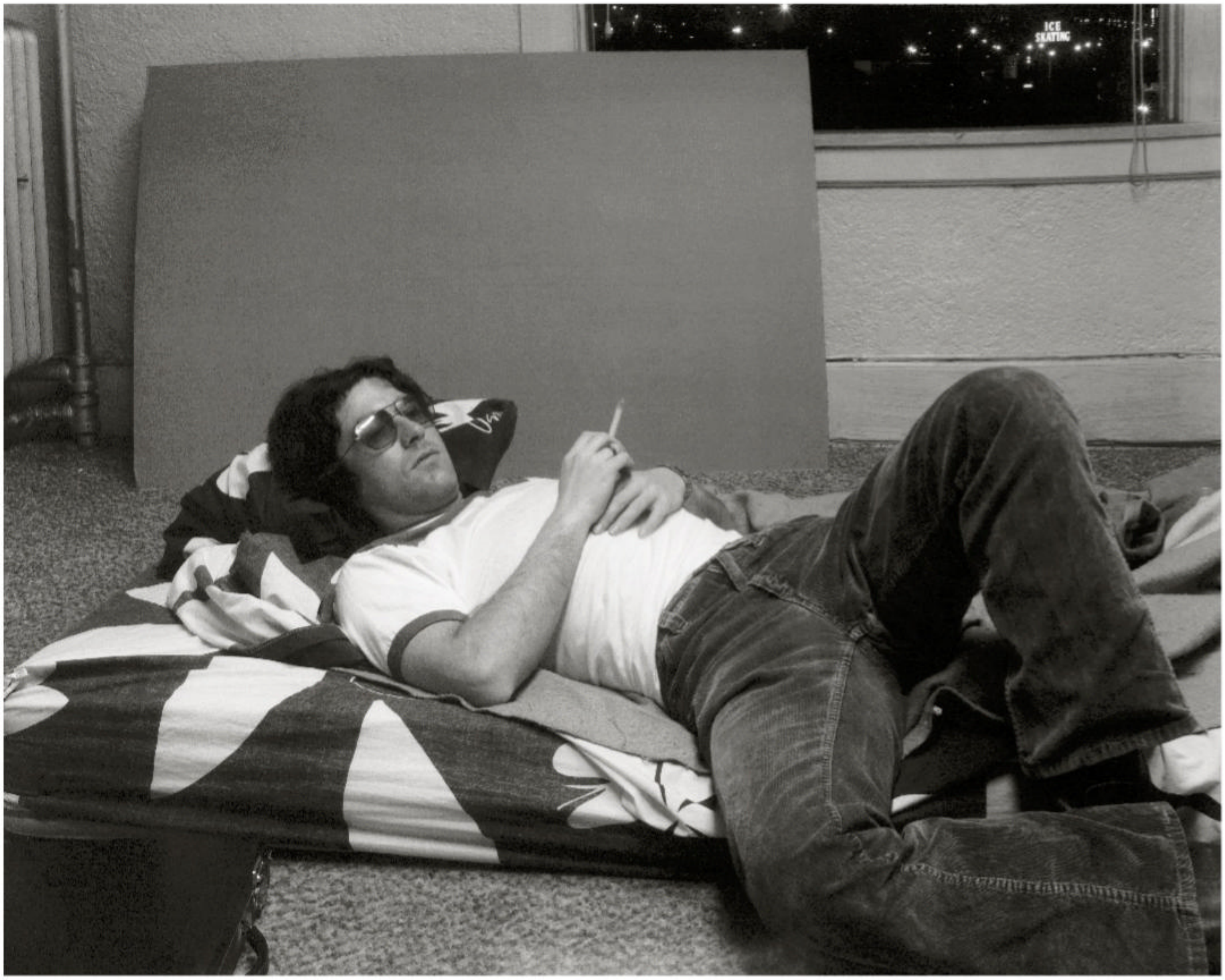
But these light sources are not always obvious, and readers are often led to consider the reason for a particular photograph's inclusion. Is it to be found in the subtle flecks of sunlight that fall on the hefty logs laid out in front of a small barn, or is it the logs themselves, whose potential energy as ignitable fuel remains untapped? Are we to take the wispy rapids of a river as capturing refracted daylight, or again, should the rushing water be considered a potential source of energy? Since a photograph is

Previous page:
***Lisbon*, 1995**

This page:
***Jack Goldstein*, 1977**

Opposite:
***Waterfall*, 1996**
All photographs courtesy the artist

Photographed light is always an abstracted representation of some deeper source of energy.



essentially the registration of photons on a light-sensitive surface, every photograph necessitates light and, as a corollary, depicts a light source, however obliquely or faintly. Welling's photographs make this precondition of the medium a conceptual paradigm and symbolic conceit, suggesting how visible light when photographed is always an abstracted and mediated representation of some deeper source of energy, whether solar, synthetic, or subjective.

Consider Welling's 1977 portrait of his CalArts classmate Jack Goldstein. His lit cigarette, the neon sign spelling "ICE SKATING" seen through a window, and the fluorescent glare on Goldstein's aviators all make the picture eligible for the series. But Goldstein's absorbed gaze and brooding pose question whether the artist might be a source of light himself, a Romantic "lamp," as the literary critic M. H. Abrams memorably put it, in contrast to the medium's more conventional metaphors of mirror and window. Throughout this body of work, materials such as glass and metal are rendered as sensuous surfaces rather than transparent or reflective transoms, so that a simple mug of water contains a thin, allusive silhouette that appears on its edge, created by a stack of books: a subtly stunning example of the translation of text into image and representation into abstraction.

And yet, just as every photograph requires light, a photograph, likewise, can never be purely abstract, since it is always a picture of something. Despite its sumptuous exploration of tonal gradients and the suggestive properties of luminous imagery, Welling's book shares something with one of the most direct and diaristic of genres, the travelogue. Produced at a moment when the artist was frequently exhibiting in Europe, the original book was, in fact, split between pictures taken in European cities and those taken in the United States. In this way, *Light Sources* serves as a meditation on regional specificity, the certain way that light appears in various parts of the world, because of not only degrees of latitude but also wattage and fixtures, revealing these familiar yet elemental conditions of vision with a degree of precision and sensitivity that arguably transcends any linguistic description.

Robert Slifkin is a professor of fine arts at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, and the author of *Quitting Your Day Job: Chauncey Hare's Photographic Work* (2022).

Studio Visit

Bharat Sikka's serene workspace in New Delhi is the result of chance and a few accidents.

Somak Ghoshal

Every time I step inside Bharat Sikka's studio, in Dhan Mill compound in Chhatarpur, located off one of New Delhi's busiest arterial roads, I feel like I have entered the Zone in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker*. The space is a unique bubble with immersive energy—albeit without the sinister vibes of the Russian master's imagination—an incubator of creativity, where the laws of everyday life are suspended.

The studio feels fitting for a charismatic photographer known internationally for a restless range of work including magazine editorials, a long-term personal project on the complexities of fatherhood, and his own publishing initiatives that support the work of others.

A converted warehouse with high ceilings, Sikka's studio is cavernous and gray, with an outer room as large as a

Bharat Sikka and his studio, Chhatarpur, New Delhi, December 2024
Photographs by Abhishek Khedekar for *Aperture*

The studio buzzes with dancers, sculptors, potters, writers, and casual visitors who drop by.

factory floor. This is his "research studio," he tells me, where Stella and Shalini, who work closely with him, sit behind screens, sorting images, organizing prints, and filing away books and papers. There are spacious desks all around with works in progress scattered on them, as well as paints, brushes, pencils, and rulers—tools you don't necessarily expect a photographer to use.

Through the window you can see people walking by. A curious few pop in to check out the scene. A troupe of dancers from the studio next door practices their lithe moves in the winter light outdoors. Monkeys trample on the roof, setting off the stray dogs outside. The world outside keeps spilling in, much like inner and outer landscapes crisscrossing through Sikka's own work.

On one side is the photographer's office. Behind a glass-fronted wall, he sits at a desk facing a large screen, next to shelves overflowing with photography books. The adjacent room holds scanners and other paraphernalia. Then there's an open area at the back, the size of a basketball court, where film screenings and performances, co-organized with artists, are held for Sikka's private audiences and sometimes the public.

Sikka created this haven of activity through a decade of chance and accident. In 2012, his old studio, also situated in the vicinity, was destroyed in a fire. "I lost all my negatives, everything," he said. After a couple of years of working from home, he started looking for a new space. "It was at that time that Devika Daulet-Singh, the founder of Photoink, pointed me to Dhan Mill."

Sikka was immediately smitten by the industrial aesthetics of the place. He rented a smaller studio at first, a former warehouse for organic food, and converted it into an oasis of wonder. Soon OddBird Theatre, a performing arts company, set up practice in the hood, as did Nappa Dori, a premium brand for leather goods. Over the next eight or nine years, the floodgates of commerce opened, and more and more entrepreneurs, designers, and other creatives began flocking to Dhan Mill.

By the end of 2023, Sikka had had enough of the commercial hub that

Do You see what I see, when I look at me?

mushroomed around his old studio. When his landlord raised the rent exorbitantly, it was the push he needed to find a different space. This time, he moved into the quieter back alleys of Dhan Mill. A year on, the studio buzzes with dancers, sculptors, potters, writers, and others bringing their ideas and energies into it. Some have their own studios on the premises, others are casual visitors who drop by.

This collaborative spirit is like oxygen for Sikka. He started his career in India with traditional forms of photography—documentary, fashion—before coming into his own during time spent in New York, from 1998 to 2002. "American cinema was a huge influence," he said, "as was the work of Philip-Lorca diCorcia." His portraits in the photographic series *Indian Men* (in the early aughts) set the stage for later experiments and adventures.

Subsequently, in *Where the Flowers Still Grow* (2017) and *The Sapper* (2022), Sikka broke out of the mold of 4-by-5 large-format photography to move into digital interventions and focus on making books of his images. "I've never been a single-image photographer," he stated. "While the camera remains the main tool of my art, I need the book as a form to tell the whole story." It was only a matter of time before he began layering painterly and sculptural techniques onto his images.

Sikka's eclectic sensibility is particularly suited to using the book as a canvas and his archive as raw material—some of his recent publications include *And Then* (2024) and *Souvenir Shop* (2024). His head is always whirring with multiple projects, some of which are marinated in the fluid space of his studio and cooked during dialogues with artists, friends, and visitors. Even as we speak, he starts showing me early iterations of his latest work in progress, *Ripples in the Pond*, in which he uses a scanner to produce an ingenious shimmering effect on the surface of the image.

"Documentation is always a first step. Distortion is the real act of departure," Sikka said. "The images are words and sentences. When put together, they create a story, novel, poem— whatever it is I want to tell."

Somak Ghoshal is a writer and critic based in New Delhi.

Alana Perino, winner of the 2025 Aperture Portfolio Prize, crafts a haunted story of familial memory in Florida.

Eli Cohen

In a spare, domestic tableau, a bare-chested older man sits pensively on the edge of a nightstand. He looks down at a white bird resting on his hand as a lamp casts light across his body and an empty mattress. Above the bed, a small wooden frame holds a painting of an angel.

The figures within this image—man, bird, angel—permeate Alana Perino's *Pictures of Birds* (2017–24), an elegiac series of photographs that searches for meaning in memory and mortality.

Perino, who was born in New York and raised by separated parents, finds home in many places. In 2020, they moved to live with their father, Joe, and stepmother, Letty, on the small Floridian island

Page 28:
***Madi's Hair*, 2022; page**
29: *Madi on Stair Lift*, 2020

This page, top:
***Lori's Shell*, 2023; bottom:**
***Dad and Samuel*, 2024**

known as Longboat Key. Perino had begun to photograph their family in the Longboat Key condo a few years earlier, as they noticed Letty first experiencing symptoms of early-onset Alzheimer's. By the time Perino relocated to Florida, Letty's condition had worsened.

In these years, their sense of home was upended along with the "strange, unwritten contract of the family," as Perino put it. Letty was younger than Joe, and ostensibly would have cared for him as he aged; now, new family roles formed in which Perino and their sister became caretakers of their stepmother. "The entire island became this eulogized space," they said. "Everything began to represent her death."

At night, Letty would speak aloud in the room Perino shared with her. "I realized, after many nights, that she was talking to the same people in the room," Perino said. "She was talking to ghosts." *Pictures of Birds* does not shy away from the idea that spirits dwell in this home, and in many ways, the photographs take comfort in their presence. Perino's family on their father's side is Catholic, though the photographer was raised Jewish; in the spiritual treatment of ancestral remembrance and protection, they find common ground among traditions. Outside Longboat Key's Catholic church, Perino photographs the three wise men conjured as statues shrouded in plastic, an uncanny scene mediating the animate and inanimate.

Letty died in 2021. Perino continued to photograph their father, sister, niece, and a few other family members until 2024, when their father sold the Longboat Key condo and moved away. The later photographs resonate with the loss and Letty's continued presence in their lives. A portrait of Perino's niece Madi floating in a pool recalls an earlier photograph of their father, though where his face turns toward the sky, Madi's is obscured by her hair as she looks down into the water. In a self-portrait, Perino, eyes closed, lays on their back in a pit dug in the sand on a beach.

Letty would repeatedly ask Perino as they photographed around the house, "Why don't you take pictures of birds?" After all, that is what most people do on Longboat Key. Perino initially decided to photograph anything but the flamingos and egrets of Sarasota County. In time, they came to understand everything they photographed as birdlike, every portrait

Gulf of Mexico, 2022

Perino's sense of home was upended along with the "strange, unwritten contract of the family."

as a self-portrait. The mutability and fluidity of corporeal figures was never more apparent than in the countless seashells cast aside on the shore. Letty had collected shells for years; Perino viewed them as an extension of nonhuman ghosts, long discomfited by the removal and disruption of a creature's life cycle. They eventually photographed the shells, too, and made excursions around the island to photograph a wider perspective: the ocean, statues, a shark living in an aquarium.

"This is when the project really began to expand from this notion of memorializing a really sad event for our family that was prolonged and changed the shape of all of our roles, to a kind of internalization of these realities, of our lived everyday experience with the dead and their presence in our home," Perino said. "How all of these ecosystems—and this particular ecosystem within Longboat Key, the humidity, the scope of life—it

This page:
***Letty's Shells*, 2020;**
opposite: *Nina's Afghan*,
2020
All photographs courtesy
the artist

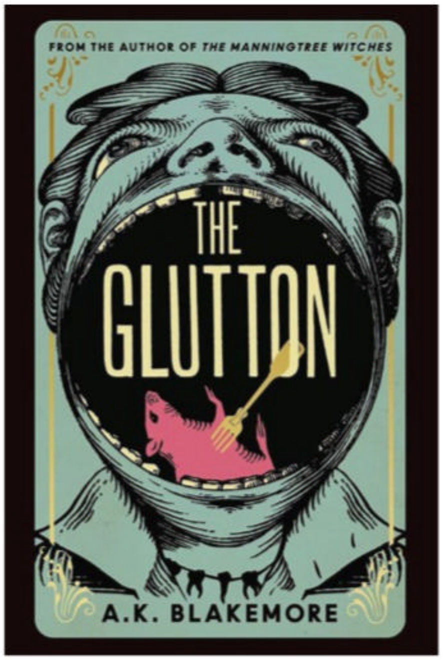
highlights how interconnected all of the different species are and how reliant we are on the shells, the mangroves, the water, and even things like the aquarium to survive and to proceed from one generation to another."

Perino's photographs rarely depict Letty, who resisted the camera's presence. In one of her few appearances, only an out-of-focus glimpse of a hand at rest is visible in the foreground. The picture's title, *Nina's Afghan* (2020), refers to the shawl made by Perino's grandmother and draped over the back of a chair. A painted portrait of their father and Letty hangs on the wall above the chair, their faces just out of the photograph's frame. Nobody ever sat in that chair. Instead it stayed empty, an outsize and invisible presence filling it, a ghostly apparition just out of reach.

Eli Cohen is a writer and photo-editor based in Brooklyn.

Curriculum
Jack Davison

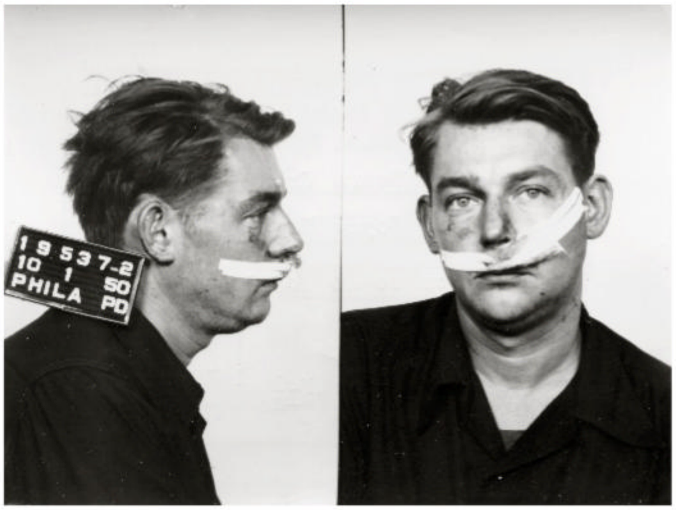
Jack Davison's nervy portraits of notables revel in off-kilter composition and dramatic chiaroscuro. Rough-hewed yet seductive, celebrities before his lens appear not as chiseled figures of improbable perfection but rather ghostly presences that recall a Weegee fun-house-mirror image or the psychological introspection of an early Ingmar Bergman film. Davison lives in London and shoots regularly for *The New York Times Magazine* and British *Vogue*, and for a range of fashion brands such as the Row and Margaret Howell, all of which seek out his peculiar but beguiling way of seeing things.



A. K. BLAKEMORE
I discovered the author A. K. Blakemore quite by accident when a new literary magazine called *Footnote* asked me to create work in reaction to her text. Amy's writing is beautiful, visceral, and urgent, and I have greedily read everything she has written. Her 2023 novel, *The Glutton*, is particularly sublime.

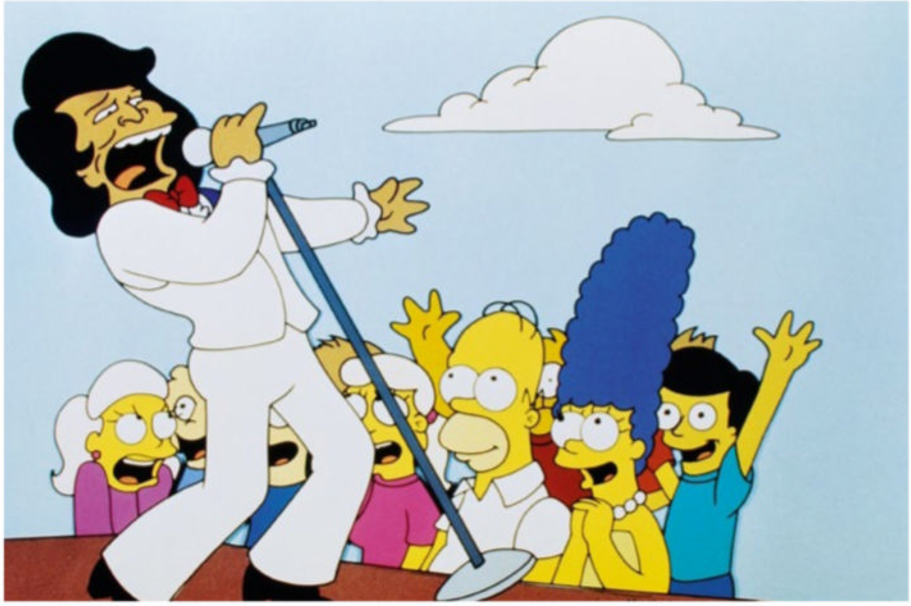
THE ADVENTURES OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN
I had a series of Monty Python VHS tapes that I watched endlessly as a kid. In the hunt for further silliness, I unearthed Terry Gilliam's 1988 *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*—a chaotic, bizarre, and visually exuberant film that I think about often. Movies of that era can seem so tactile, and the limitations set by a pre-VFX-heavy world forced directors to be more creative. I love that everything in the film feels a little haphazard but nonetheless beautiful.

INSIDE
Ever since *Pokémon Blue* appeared on the Game Boy in the 1990s, video games have been a part of my life. There's something that speaks to my imagination when I'm playing that completely draws me in. *Inside* (2016) is one of those perfect gaming experiences. It functions as simply as any regular platformer, but it toys with built-in preconceptions and punishes you for your presumptions. You play as a mute, unnamed character exploring a surreal industrial hinterland. The game's sparse sound and dramatic lighting are equal parts enthralling and terrifying.



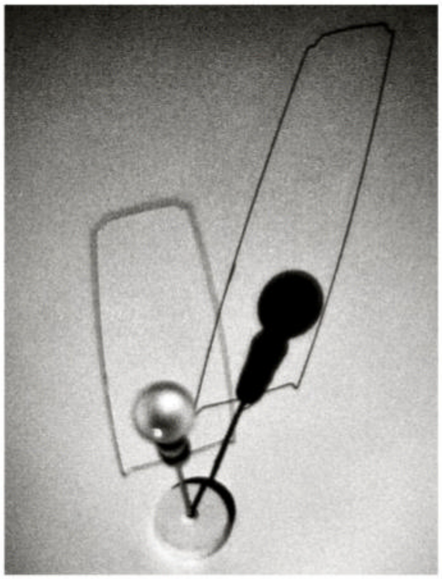
LEAST WANTED

I met Mark Michaelson when I went to the United States for the first time, in 2013. His apartment was a relic of a bygone era of New York: a tiny, brilliant space filled with books, artist ephemera, and mugshots. We'd known each other awhile online, but as a first step into the city, this was really special. He handed me a copy of *Least Wanted: A Century of American Mugshots* (2006), and I fell into his world of riveting faces. It's one of my most treasured books, and I always come back to it. His passion for the vernacular set me on a path delving into found photographs.



THE SIMPSONS

The Simpsons, particularly seasons one to ten, has been a big influence on my sense of the silly and absurd. It was on British TV at the prime slot: post-dinnertime on a school night, following on from *Neighbours*. There's not a day that goes by without something from those episodes floating into my head unannounced.



BRETT WALKER and FLICKR

When I was a teenager out in rural Essex with dodgy internet, Flickr opened my eyes to a world of imagery that I wouldn't have had access to otherwise. Early on, I stumbled across the beautiful—and sometimes brutal—street photography of Brett Walker. After I did a project on his work for an art class, Brett became a big part of my life. He was the first person to sit me down and tell me what I was doing wrong. Served with an acid tongue, his lessons would smart and sting, and I'd leave feeling angry. But within a week I'd realize what I'd been taught and come back with a fresh batch of photographs. Flickr, at the time, was a cauldron of creativity, a rewarding community that encouraged me to share work and experiment daily.

See page 6 for image credits.

Guest Editor’s Note

Tanisha C. Ford considers the ongoing work of style, self-expression, and political change.

Liberated Threads

MELANIN ABUNDANT. THE DARK LENSES OF SOUTH African activist Amonge Sinxoto’s Black Vibe Tribe sunglasses obscure her eyes. The message, written on the frames in white block text, speaks for her. Sinxoto’s pride is so uncontainable it bursts through her dermis. Holy Ghost dances on her melanated skin. It’s an offering. We give thanks.

The Kenyan-born, Johannesburg-based Cedric Nzaka (who runs everydaypeoplestories, the popular photography blog) snapped this image of Sinxoto at the 2018 Afropunk music festival in Joburg. By composing the portrait around Sinxoto’s face, Nzaka enunciates the power of Black abundance. It’s in the architectural baby hairs, the Senegalese twists that expand into a low Afro puff ponytail, dainty pearl earrings, and the headdress—designed by the South African hair artist Nikiwe Dlova—that resembles a helmet (it can also be worn as a Zulu-style crown). Dlova’s technique of affixing hair over flexi rods offers a new take on the now-iconic hair-in-rollers aesthetic, elevating it from a pre-style to royal wear. The photograph is simultaneously vintage and futuristic, dainty and militaristic.

It’s the circles. On Sinxoto’s shades, on the headpiece. They offer a Global South Black girl geometry that emanates from the ancestral soil and conjures itself into a way of knowing

Kwame Brathwaite, *MER*, 1968
© Kwame Brathwaite Estate

Shaniqwa Jarvis, *Untitled*, 2021
© the artist

It is time to revisit the concept of style as resistance across Africa and its diaspora.

that is equally artistic and mathematical. A geometry that imagines new theorems for new worlds. A cosmology, flexible like the rods on Sinxoto's crown, bending and folding time. MELANIN ABUNDANT.

> Fashion has never been trivial for people of African descent.
> It is an act of personal expression.
> A pleasure practice.
> A ritual.
> A political language.
> A tool of resistance.

When I started writing about Black fashion over a decade ago, I was taken with the ways that Black women across the African diaspora incorporated dress into everyday acts of resistance in the 1960s and 1970s. Afros, dashikis, cowrie shells, and head wraps communicated something about their sense of self, pride in their Blackness, and an embodied vision of freedom. In the United States, they wore denim overalls in solidarity with Southern sharecroppers. In South Africa, they sported hot pants and brandished stiletto heels as weapons. In the United Kingdom, they adopted the leather jackets and berets of the US Black Panther Party. I was taken by what I identified as a cycle of pleasure, innovation, and social violence

Cedric Nzaka, ***Afro Punk 2018, Constitutional Hill, Johannesburg, South Africa***
© the artist

MELANIN
MELANIN
ABUNDANT
ABUNDANT

through which Black styles across the diaspora were fortified. *Liberated Threads: Black Women, Style, and the Global Politics of Soul* (2015) was the book that emerged from years of research across three continents and a constellation of cities.

The "movement of movements" that shaped the 1960s represented the pinnacle of fashion activism. Radical activists; entertainers; fashion designers; and young students like my mother, Amye Glover-Ford, battled Jim Crow segregation, apartheid, European colonialism, and the afterlives of slavery. Their clothing became a uniform, armor in the struggle. As I excavated archives across the Black Atlantic, I stumbled upon the work of photographers such as Kwame Brathwaite, Malick Sidibé, James Barnor, Neil Kenlock, and Ming Smith, among many others chronicling this global movement. They used the fast-changing technology of the camera to capture the political

imaginations and freedom dreams of young people of African descent, laid bare on garments and accessories.

These photographs served as portals to an era. An era that for Gen Xers like me, was taught in US history classes and conveyed through popular culture as one of seismic social shifts and legislative changes, the likes of which we had never seen before and would never see again. But their rendering of the history was mangled and distorted. In these photographs lay another political reality. An episteme, a way of knowing a Black past through the practice of adornment. These images wrench the words *style* and *fashion* from the grips of the Western fashion world, which had proselytized and commodified them by linking them to conspicuous consumption and superficiality.

Their messages were echoed elsewhere in my emerging Black style archive. In Black magazines—*Ebony*, *Essence*, *Jet*, *Sepia*, South Africa's *Drum*, *Flamingo*, a West Indian magazine published in the UK—on jazz, soul, and funk album covers; and in memoirs, yearbooks, and personal correspondence. They told of underground African diasporic fashion economies that resisted capitalist impulses, with their own taste cultures, revered designers, tailors and seamstresses, second-hand markets, and politics of the liberated Black body.

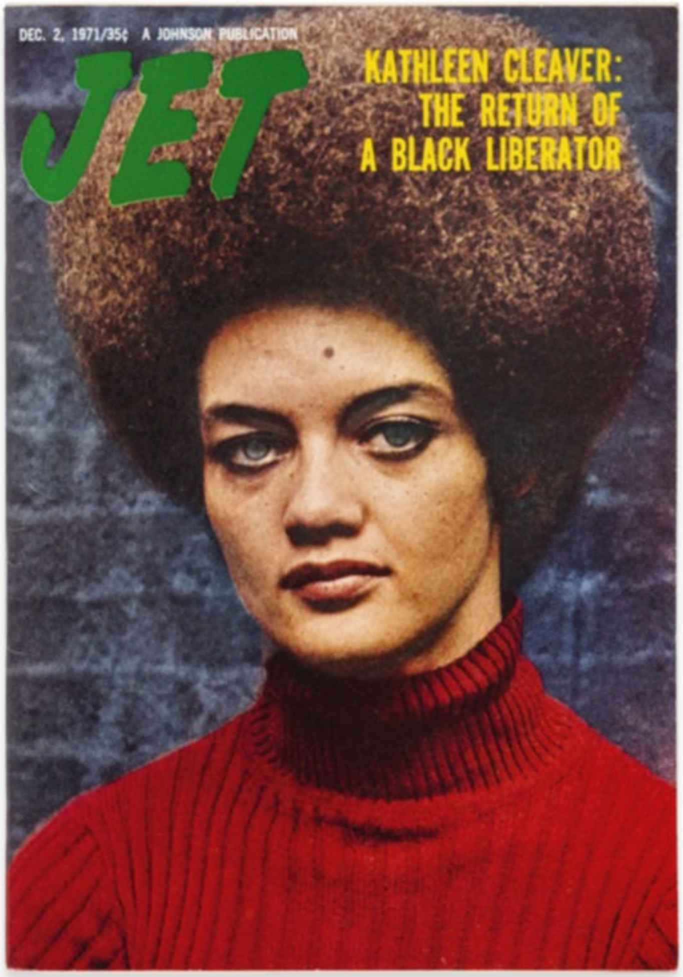
I engaged in this form of deep study about Black style and its transgressive politics amid the "they sleep, we grind" culture that was social media in the early 2010s, tweeting in 140 characters about my archival finds. Like the rest of the world, I became enamored with posting selfies on Instagram. We were amateur photographers. Playing with aperture and saturation until our self-portraits were soaked with color, so wet they bent reality. Auteurs making filmic shorts for Vine with our smartphones. Bleaching out the edges, blurring, shadowing. Filters as play. A digital visual language.

As 2011 folded into 2015—the year that *Liberated Threads* was published—my tweets and IG posts became more enraged and furious as a large-scale Movement for Black Lives unfurled around me. Names of Black folks of all genders memorialized on T-shirts, their names linked with the & sign. Hashtags proclaiming #blacklivesmatter, #sayhername, #handsupdontshoot. Viral videos of the Black massive taking to the streets in protest, dancing and screaming to Kendrick Lamar's 2015 anthem "Alright": *We gon' be alright / We gon' be alright / Do you hear me, do you feel me? / We gon' be alright.*

We were living through an immense social and political uprising to end anti-Black violence in all forms. Suddenly, the book I'd written was not about the past in the ways my teachers had presented it. *Liberated Threads* was living history. Just like the young people of the 1960s and '70s used clothing and accessories to define the contours of their movement, chanting "Black Is Beautiful" and "The Revolution Has Come," folks in the 2010s were too. In the United States, hip-hop fashions (a direct middle finger to "respectability politics") were garments of choice. Skinny jeans and joggers, hoodies and screen-printed T-shirts, snapback ball caps, Jordans, tattoos and piercings, box braids with Kanekalon hair in the colors of the rainbow, and hoop earrings. A new generation of documentary photographers—including Andre Wagner and Devin Allen—were recording the moment.

It's a moment we still have not had time to process, to fully understand. A moment that was punctuated in many ways by the pandemic. A calendar of death marking time as we

> This is not a typical fashion issue. It does not aim to *prove* that Black people are stylish, with our own fashion ecosystems. It is a *refusal*.


DEC. 2, 1971/35¢ A JOHNSON PUBLICATION
JET
KATHLEEN CLEAVER: THE RETURN OF A BLACK LIBERATOR

This page:
Kathleen Cleaver on the cover of *Jet*, December 1971

Opposite:
Nontsikelelo Veleko, *Hloni*, 2003/2007
Courtesy the artist

Agfa
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This page:
James Barnor, *Sick-Hagemeyer shop assistant with darkroom chemical bottles, used as a guide for the colour processing laboratory, Accra*, ca. 1970
© the artist and courtesy Galerie Clémentine de la Féronnière

Opposite:
Arielle Bobb-Willis, *New Orleans*, 2016
Courtesy the artist

marched into the turbulent 2020s. When latex gloves and face masks became an essential part of our everyday attire. When grind culture was replaced by "soft life" and "rest is resistance." We were gearing up for an even bigger fight.

Ten years after the publication of *Liberated Threads*, the world is still on fire. It is time to revisit the concept of style as resistance across Africa and its diaspora.

But this is not a typical fashion issue. It does not aim to *prove* that Black people are stylish, with our own fashion ecosystems. It does not beg for Black people to be seen as beautiful, or human. It's not a primer on Africana histories. It is a *refusal*.

I wanted to curate a visual conversation between Black image makers who are remixing, reimagining, and, in some cases, rejecting the aesthetics and political grammars of the 1960s and '70s soul era. Liz Johnson Artur captures the beautiful clash of high fashion and London street style through the work of designers such as Feben and Mowalola, from Ethiopia and Nigeria, respectively. Interviews with director Melina Matsoukas and stylist Yashua Simmons—who are innovating in the commercial space—contrast with that between Ja'Tovia Gary and Fatima Jamal, who both subvert dominant narratives of Black life through filmic collages that experiment with the politics of form. Devin Allen offers us another way to think about protest photography, capturing activists in moments of joy or rest. Amy DuBois Barnett on the legacy of millennial lifestyle magazine, *Honey*, with its fly fashion editorials. The hair artist Nikki Nelms, whose work epitomizes the Black whimsical imagination. The generational influence of the Malian photographer Seydou Keïta, as seen in the work of Silvia Rosi and Nuits Balnéaires. This issue is on a mission to unearth unusual pairings, the Black uncanny. Images that disturb and confound vis-à-vis those that avail conventional visual tropes. Ultimately, I wanted to see what happens when we take the renegade tool of the camera—or what the historian Dan Berger calls "insurgent technology"—to demand answers of style. I wanted to hear from contemporary Black image makers about what's at stake for Black communities today in the face of a rising tide of global capitalism and genocide. How have camera and film technologies made new modes (and nodes) of creative expression possible?

I hope this issue offers a metalanguage for people who are trying to make sense of the world. Who refuse to accept current conditions. Who dare to imagine a free, Black future. MELANIN ABUNDANT.

Tanisha C. Ford is a writer and history professor based in Harlem.

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Seydou Keïta

In midcentury Bamako, sitting for a portrait in Keïta's studio was a defining assertion of identity.

Kobby Ankomah Graham

Living Archive

A YOUNG WOMAN GAZES CONFIDENTLY AT THE camera, her black hair adorned with white cowrie shells; a man poses in a sharply tailored suit and glasses, embodying an elegance that is at once African and European. The act of sitting for a portrait in Seydou Keïta's studio was a quiet but deliberate assertion of identity in a heady age of self-determination.

Taken mostly between the late 1940s and 1960s, Keïta's portraits are master classes in texture and composition. His studio—located on land his father gave him behind a prison in the Malian capital city of Bamako—welcomed a diverse range of visitors after its 1948 opening, from government officials, traders, and intellectuals to artists and everyday members of Mali's rising middle class. Some went to the studio for professional pictures; others went to record their growing status and personal achievements in ways that could be hung on the walls of their homes, stored in family albums, or given away as gifts. Much like the highlife music that would soon become the rage across West Africa—a genre blending traditional African elements with Western influences, creating the aspirational soundtrack to African independence—Keïta captured not just the aesthetics of an era but the ambitions of a people. His process was meticulous. Known for his patient, precise use of a large-format camera, he favored natural over artificial light. His signature use of shallow depth of field ensured that attention remained on his subjects and their attire, creating an intimacy that distinguished his work from more conventional studio photography of the time.

Page 44:
***Untitled*, ca. 1952–55**

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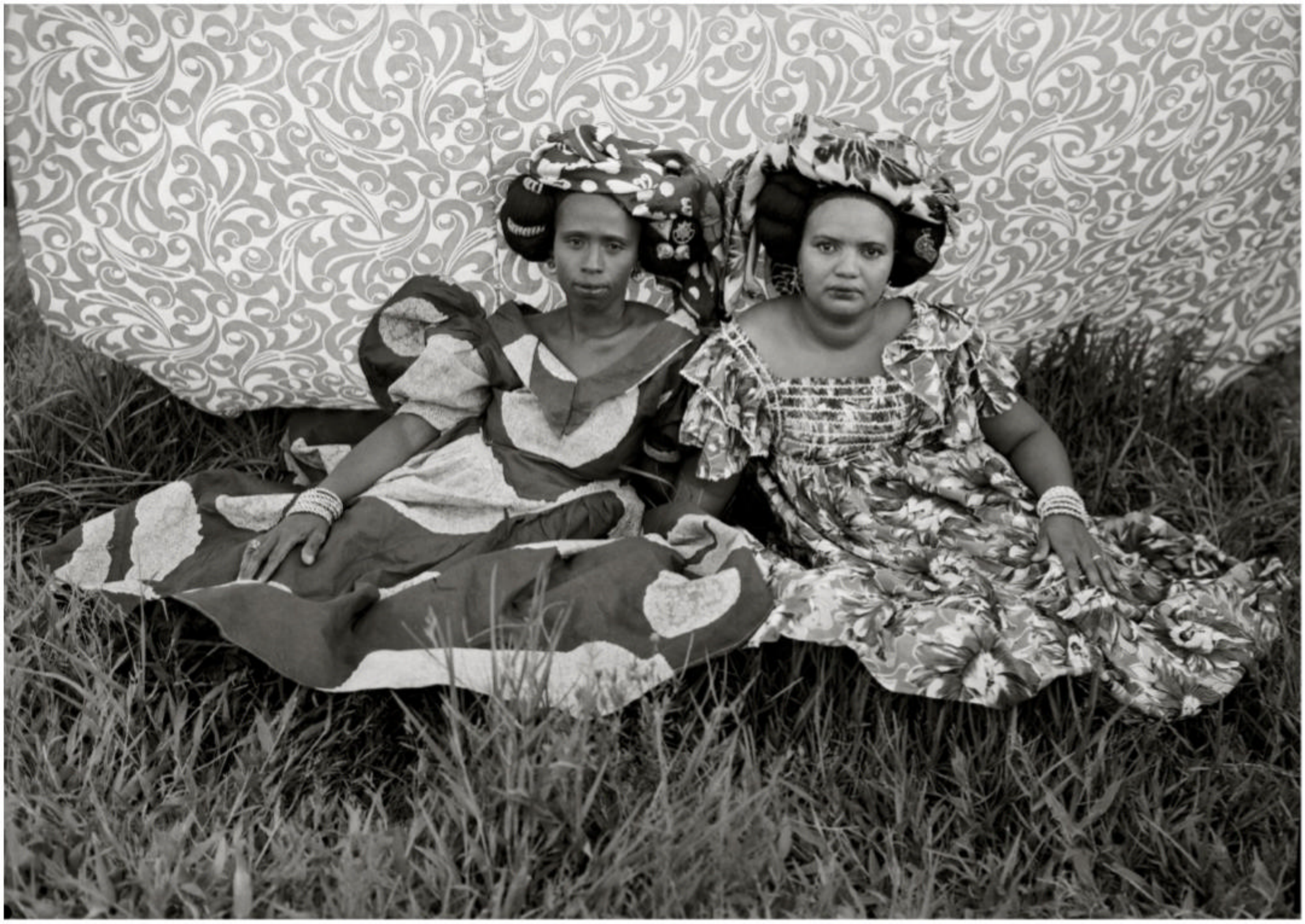
Keïta captured not just the aesthetics of an era but the ambitions of a people.



Moreover, as the late Nigerian curator Okwui Enwezor—one of Keïta's foremost champions and exegetes—has noted, the photographer conceived of his studio as a porous site, forgoing the late-Victorian device of painted, idealized backdrops for quotidian, ever-changing textiles that allowed him the flexibility to make work in various settings. "Any space could become a studio for Keïta," Enwezor wrote in 2010.

Born in Bamako in 1921, Keïta began his journey with photography in 1935 at the age of fourteen when his uncle gave him a Kodak camera. He would eventually work with Mountaga Dembélé, a former schoolteacher who shifted careers to become one of Mali's first professional photographers. At one point, Dembélé entrusted all his photographs to Keïta, prompting some scholars to question the distinction between their images, though others contend that the difference is immediately evident to anyone who looks closely: Keïta's portraits employ a more deliberate construction, whereas Dembélé's feel spontaneous and raw. In any case, both men are rightly venerated in Mali—and beyond—as the country's photographic pioneers.

Today, Bamako's long roads weave between colonial-era buildings and new developments. The city is situated along the banks of the Niger River, where its pirogue boats, carved from single tree trunks, drift past colorful markets, echoing its past as a vital crossroads along ancient trade routes linking West Africa to North Africa and farther regions. Bamako was once a key city in the ancient Mali Empire, which flourished across West Africa from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, its heart being the legendary Timbuktu. Posterity remembers the empire's ruler Mansa Musa I as arguably the richest person in history (with a net worth of around $400 billion when adjusted for inflation), thanks to Mali's vast gold and salt reserves, and for his legendary pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324, during which his lavish distribution of gold caused inflation in Egypt.

Now a nation, Mali remains a creative hub where tradition merges with contemporary global influences. Its musicians are internationally renowned, ranging from the soulful sounds of icons such as Salif Keita and Oumou Sangaré, to the African blues of Ali Farka Touré and Tinariwen, to the Afropop fusion of the likes of Fatoumata Diawara. Bamako is Mali's capital and one of Africa's largest, most populous cities. Since 1994, thousands of photographers, filmmakers, and art enthusiasts have gathered there for Rencontres Africaines de la Photographie, widely known as the Bamako Biennale, Africa's first and largest photography event, consisting of a large program of exhibitions, talks, and meetings.

In the middle of the twentieth century, however, Bamako was in a state of acute sociopolitical upheaval, its people watching while the might of France fell at their feet. The city bore the weight of colonial exploitation from the late nineteenth century until Mali wrested freedom back in 1960. Even as France urged its colonial subjects to prioritize European fashion over their own, the people of Mali simply integrated it into their existing styles. While European fabrics, including damask and wax prints, now synonymous with African fashion,

This page, left:
Untitled, ca. 1953–57;
right: *Untitled*, ca.
1952–55

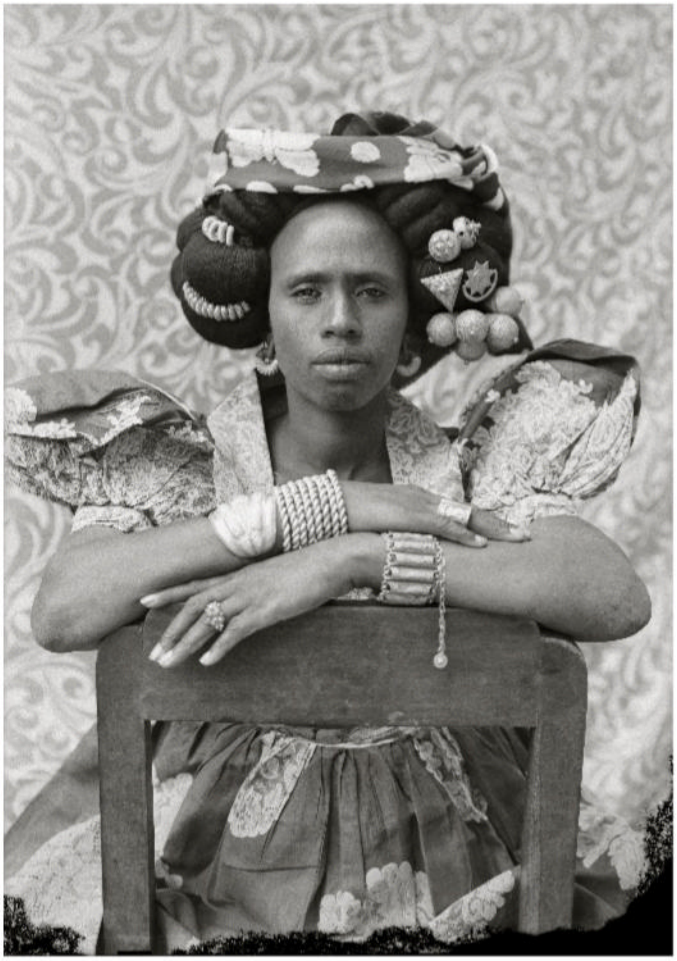
Opposite:
Untitled, ca. 1952–55

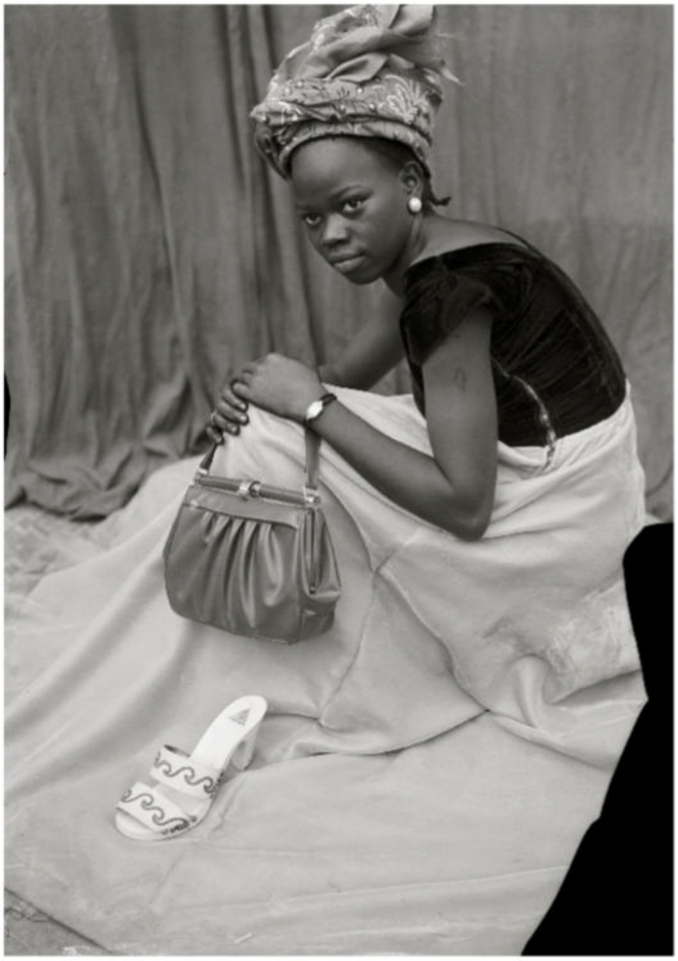
Keïta's images offer windows into a world where individuals claim space within a rapidly shifting society.

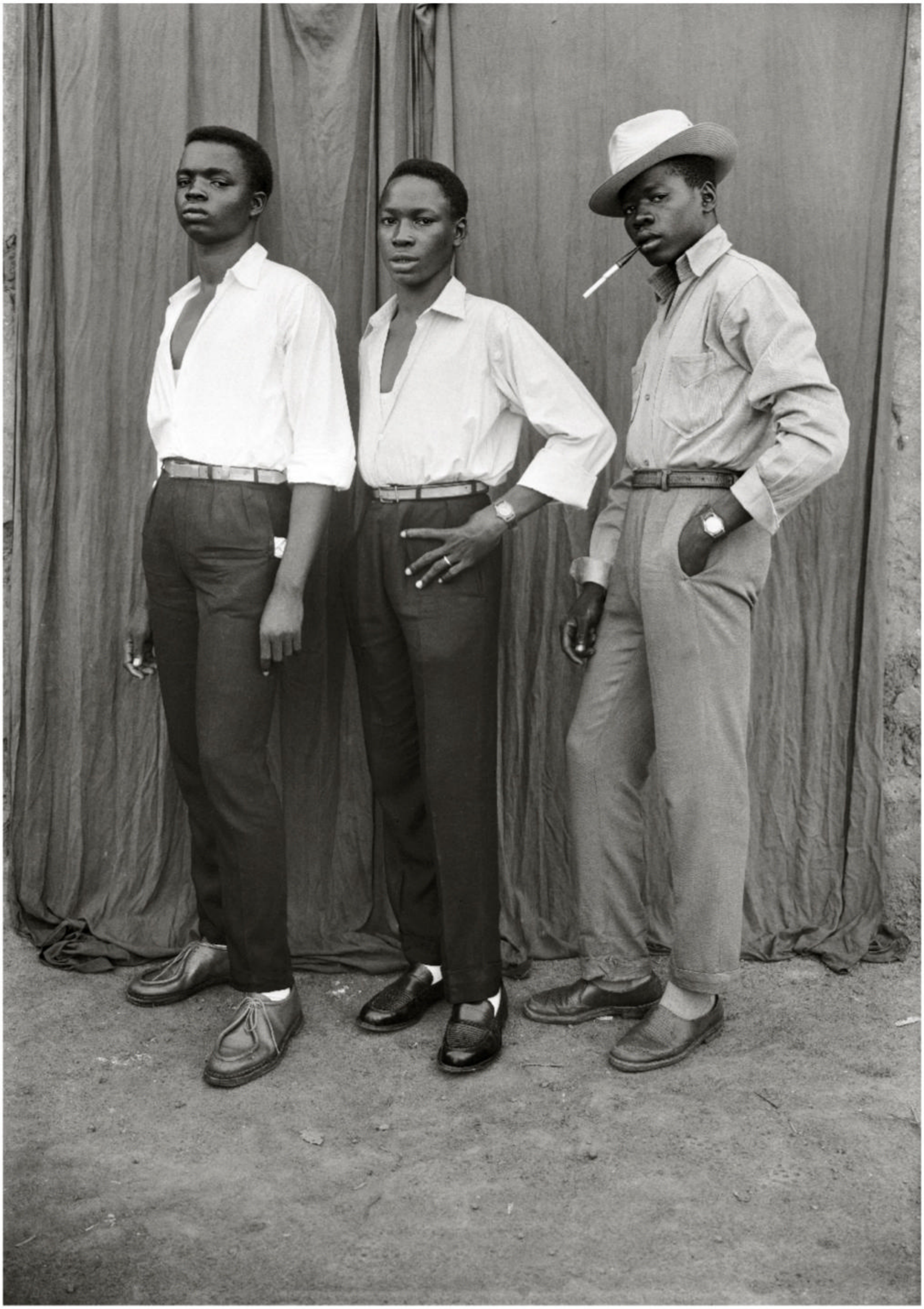
became symbols of cosmopolitanism, traditional mud cloth (bògòlanfini), indigo dyeing, and intricate embroidery remained embedded in the social and spiritual fabric of the region, forming the foundation of its material culture. Such textiles appear throughout Keïta's photographs, connecting his sitters to both tradition and global influences. Retaining a connection to the former was an important act as the colonial project attempted to supress everything culturally African that it could not extract and plunder.

Although he is now celebrated as one of the most accomplished photographers of the twentieth century, Keïta remained largely unknown in the West until the early 1990s, when some of his photographs (uncredited at the time) that were shown at an exhibition in New York came to the attention of the French curator André Magnin. This set in motion a mission to Mali to find Keïta and introduce his extraordinary portraiture—consisting of thousands of images—to a global audience. Others, including the photographers Bernard Descamps and Françoise Huguier, who presented his work at Les Rencontres d'Arles and at the Bamako Biennale, would also help introduce the work to new audiences.

This success has not, however, come without controversy. Some have questioned the commercialization of Keïta's portraits, and the way their deep cultural ties to Mali are often diminished when framed for the Western art market, a debate that, in turn, connects to broader issues of appropriation and exploitation of African art within global networks. In Keïta's case, his prints were upsized, from their original, modest







dimensions of 5-by-7 inches, for the contemporary market and an imagined clientele purchasing art at blue-chip galleries like Gagosian and Sean Kelly. An illuminating 2006 article in the *New York Times* by Michael Rips outlined the multipronged, dramatic saga and litigious debates around the authenticity of some editions produced after Keïta's death.

This fall, the Brooklyn Museum, in New York, will hold an exhibition that represents an opportunity to once again assess Keïta's contributions. The show aims to situate Keïta's genius within its cultural and historical context, and to highlight his family's role in preserving his legacy. Catherine McKinley, author of *The African Lookbook: A Visual History of 100 Years of African Women* (2021), is curating the exhibition. When I spoke with her last winter, she explained that it will allow visitors to immerse themselves in Keïta's world. His photographs will be displayed alongside textiles and ephemera loaned from the archives of numerous contemporary Malian and Senegalese scholars, collectors, and designers. Highlights include a Ducretet Thomson radio, identical to one seen in several of Keïta's iconic images, as well as an intricately hand-stitched indigo camisole from 1902 and a women's pagne (wrapper) from the Musée de la Femme Henriette-Bathily in Dakar that almost perfectly replicates one seen in his pictures.

Unsurprisingly, his work, with its precision and exquisite clarity, has drawn comparisons to August Sander's portraits made in Germany in the early twentieth century. Keïta's photography is likewise rooted in the culture and currents of its time. "Keïta crafted a distinctive modernist photographic language anchored in the Malian arts of textile," Giulia Paoletti, associate professor of African art at the University of Virginia, told me. The cultural and economic forces shaping Keïta's work were deeply diverse and intertwined. Jennifer Bajorek, an associate professor specializing in literature, art, and visual studies in contemporary Africa at Hampshire College, added that "his photographs bear witness to longstanding histories of trade, trade routes, and zones of cultural and economic exchange. They reveal and carry counter-colonial geographies. This is part of their extraordinary legacy."

Bajorek is critical of earlier scholars' preoccupation with whether the textiles in Keïta's photographs were African or European, given the many cultural currents these objects embody. By way of example, she points to the *sanu koloni* gold choker worn by many women who went to Keïta's studio. Its name—meaning "colony gold" in Bambara, a language spoken across Mali—acknowledges its colonial ties. Yet its cruciform shape and five raised points reflect Maure and Amazigh designs, with jewelry historians tracing its craftsmanship and aesthetics to Jewish goldsmiths from the Maghreb, whose techniques and motifs influenced adornment traditions across the region. Bajorek noted that items such as *sanu koloni* and *koso walan*—a dark-blue-and-white checkered strip-woven blanket often seen as a backdrop or mat in Keïta's pictures—possess both colonial history and cross-cultural influences. "A community's relationships to indigo and indigo-dyed textiles, the protective properties of the number five, the influence of Islam, ideas of Blackness associated with gold, the spiritual as well as material legacies of a millennium of Saharan crossings—all of this is there and, in its way, visible or traced in the photographs made by Keïta in his Bamako studio," Bajorek said.

More recent history and events have hampered ongoing studies and engagement with Keïta's pictures and legacy. In the

***Untitled*, ca. 1954–60**

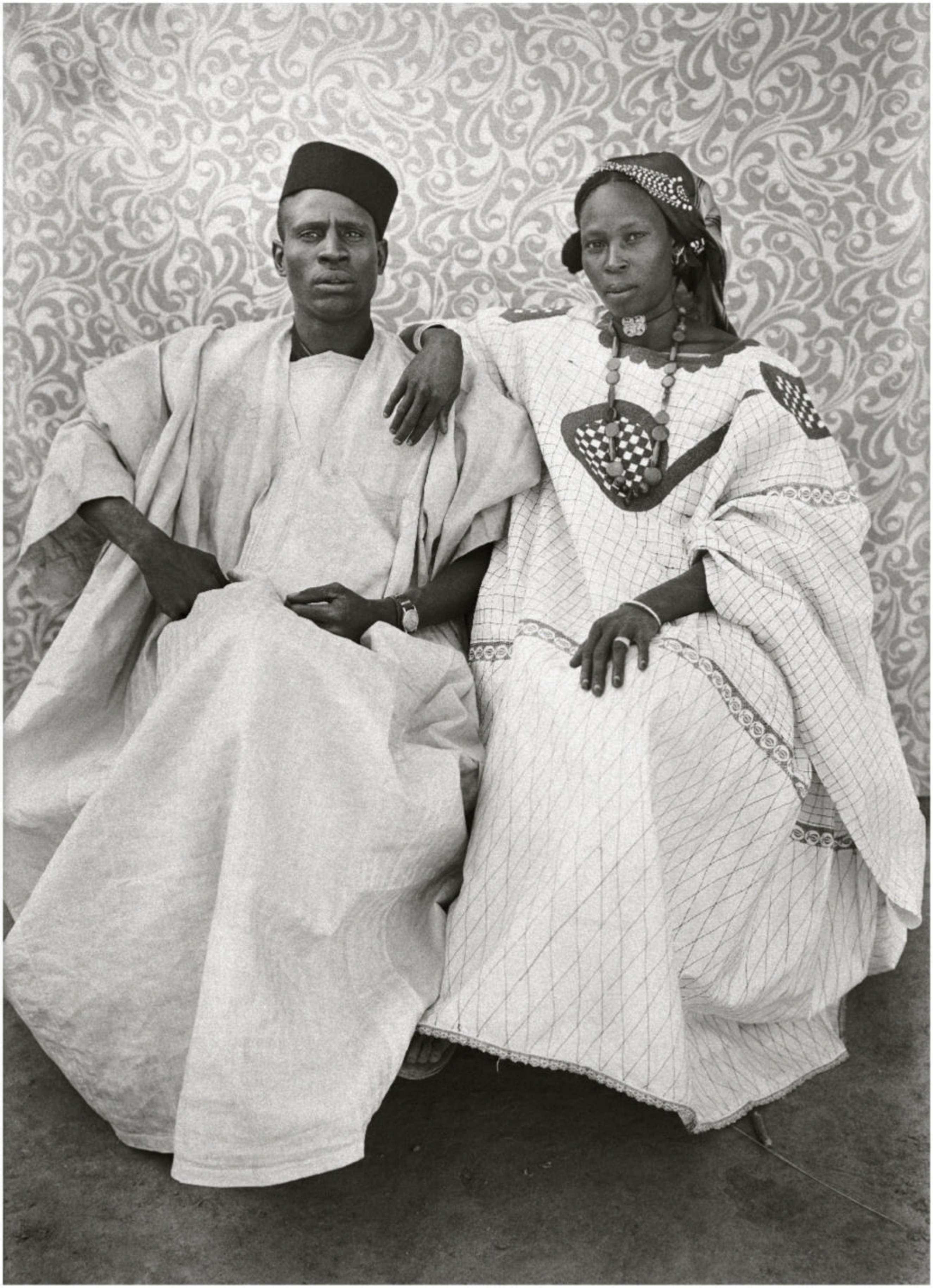
This page:
Untitled, 1958

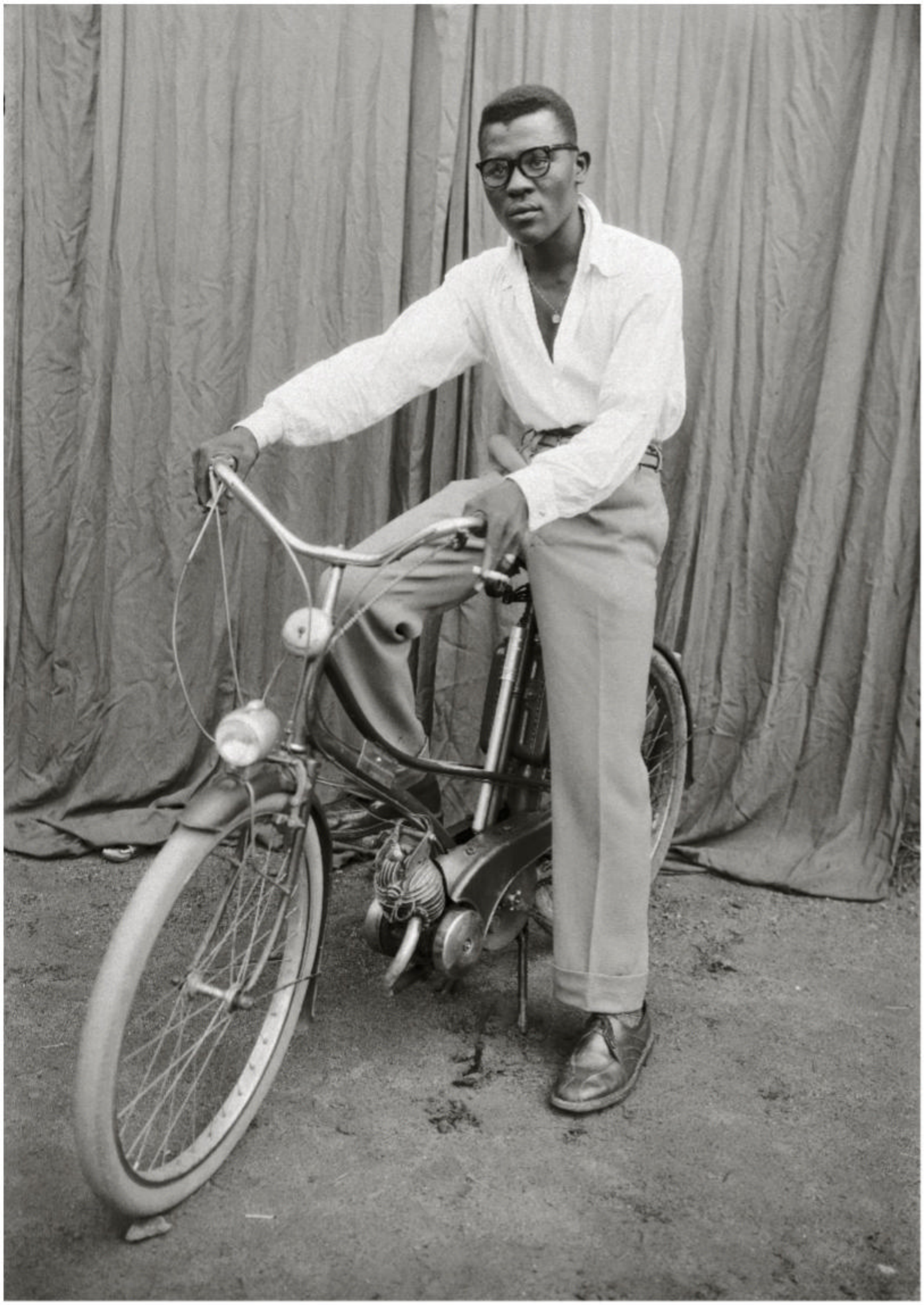
Opposite:
Untitled, ca. 1954–57

spring of 2024, McKinley traveled to Mali to meet with the Keïta family as part of her research. But with the ongoing conflict in Mali—which began in 2012, when northern insurgents sought independence—she extended her search beyond the country's borders, delving into archives and collections within the large Malian communities of Dakar and Saint-Louis in neighboring Senegal to gather the pieces that will help bring Keïta's work to life in the upcoming exhibition.

With its stronger colonial ties and more urbanized infrastructure, Senegal's long tradition of studio photography dates as far back as 1859. In contrast, Mali's first studio was established by the Frenchman Pierre Garnier in 1935. Garnier trained several of Mali's earliest photographers, including Dembélé, but it would take another decade before they would start producing their own studio photographs, opening the door for others, such as the legendary Malick Sidibé, who looked up to Keïta and called him "the Elder." Keïta's formal studio portraits not only capture the elegance and aspirations of post-colonial Mali, but also reflect the growing desire for independence, eventually achieved in 1960. In contrast, Sidibé's candid nightlife photography, which flourished in the 1960s and 1970s, conveys the energy and popular culture of a nation embracing its newfound freedom. Together, they paint a dynamic portrait of a country in flux.

Mali's relatively late start in photography turned out to be a blessing, allowing its photographic culture to develop with greater freedom from the colonial conventions that defined Senegal's numerous, more formal studios. Keïta was arguably the first Malian photographer to fully embrace this freedom. So formidable was his craft and reputation that in 1962 he was appointed Mali's official state photographer. The arc of his career was punctuated by the progression of Mali's history, all the way from how his portraiture mirrored the high cosmopolitan hopes that followed the country's independence, to the military junta that pushed him into retirement in 1977 at the age of fifty-six. At this point, Keïta started pursuing his second passion: auto mechanics. Moving from photography to working on cars may sound like quite a switch, but it had been a passion of Keïta's before his uncle put the Kodak in his teenage hands. It afforded him a more sedate life, away from the politics of the time. Having been originally trained in the family business of carpentry and furniture making, Keïta had always been a man





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***Untitled*, ca. 1952–55**

Opposite:
***Untitled*, 1949**
All photographs ©
SKPEAC/the estate of
Seydou Keïta and courtesy
The Jean Pigozzi African
Art Collection

of his hands. McKinley sees a kind of consistency here: "He was a real technical guy. He liked to tinker and learn and take things apart completely and reconstruct them. That was kind of his nature. He did it with cars, he did it with cameras and everything."

Keïta died in Paris (where he had traveled for medical attention) in 2001 at the age of eighty. Today, the Bamako property his father gave him can still be found with his family's name hanging from its tall wrought-iron gate. His legacy within Mali remains strong, with his prints found in places such as the Musée National du Mali, which showcases the country's

cultural heritage and history through an exceptional collection of traditional and contemporary art, including sculptures, textiles, historical artifacts, and photography by the likes of Keïta, Sidibé, and others. "Keïta is widely revered in Mali today," said Antawan I. Byrd, a photography curator at the Art Institute of Chicago who has worked in Mali. "And his legacy is affirmed through symbolic gestures such as the Grand Prix Seydou Keïta Award, the top prize given at the Bamako Encounters Biennial of African Photography. Yet, despite the international visibility and acclaim his photography has rightfully achieved, Keïta remains, in many ways, a mythologized figure. There is still much to explore and critically examine about his practice."

This mythologization stems in part from how Keïta's work has been understood within global art circles as a singular, almost omniscient eye of post-colonial Mali, widely celebrated yet often removed from the complexities of his working conditions, the commercial nature of his practice, and the broader photographic landscape of Bamako at the time. As a studio photographer, Keïta primarily responded to the needs of his clients, creating portraits that reflected their aspirations in a season of change. Unlike many modernist photographers in the West, he did not fetishize authorial control, and likely considered himself both a craftsman and an artist. While shaping images to meet demand, he was acutely aware of the times in which he lived but may not have consciously curated the legacy he has left behind. Over time, Keïta's work has been imbued with layers of meaning—revered as both documentary and art—even while it is sometimes unmoored from its original context, a recurring problem in the circulation of African photographic archives.

Keïta's images offer windows into a world where individuals claim space within a rapidly shifting society. They are *living* archives, constantly being reinterpreted through contemporary perspectives. They show the enduring power of photography to capture more than mere aesthetic. In contrast to the colonial photography that came before Keïta, which presented the African as mere object, his subjects gaze directly into the camera and claim their place in history on their own terms. Yet his work endures as not only a quiet defiance of colonial narratives but a testament to his mastery. His images do more than resist; they honor, elevating each subject with a care so profound that their presence, etched by Keïta into history using shadow and light, feels both intimate and monumental.

Kobby Ankomah Graham is a writer, DJ, lecturer, and cultural researcher who lives in Accra.

Liz Johnson Artur
London Calling

Gazelle Mba

The photograph sneaks up on me. A Black girl with a platinum-blonde buss down wig, her face slightly cocked, a closed invitation. We might as well not exist. She is lined up backstage with another woman like her, matching in Mowalola T-shirts emblazoned with the word *ebony* in bold capitalized letters, fishnet tights, and black thongs. Their location is indistinct, a fashion show or a nightclub or both, but this image, taken behind the curtain in the fever of preparation, nudges at a memory I believed lost. It brings to mind East London underground raves and sweaty red-light basements, afterparties in someone's Camberwell flat dancing till midafternoon, running to catch the 185 bus home afterward, spent but satisfied. And I think only Liz Johnson Artur can do this—the photograph's subtle evocation of nostalgia, not for the past but for the present, a longing for a time that is still here.

This longing, as powerful as it is ineffectual, is common to the Black diaspora, the desire to return as strong as its impossibility. Johnson Artur herself was born in Bulgaria to Russian and Ghanaian parents in the mid-1960s. She spent her childhood and adolescence living in West Germany with her mother. During trips to Ukraine to visit relatives, she was exposed to the notion of clothing as a social language—a recurring theme in her work. Her Levi's were inconspicuous in 1970s Germany but prized and sought after in the Soviet Union. She would pack suitcases stuffed with "hard to get" clothes for each of her family members, the Western labels within the scarves and jeans the objects of fantasy and desire. But clothing in a Johnson Artur photograph is never a status symbol or marker of wealth—hers is not fashion photography but the documentation of what she calls "presence," which pertains to the stories her subjects carry of loss, heartbreak, and redemption, the ordinary stories of work and leisure.

Movement between worlds—first Germany and Ukraine, followed by New York and then London, where she has been based for more than thirty years—formed Johnson Artur's attunement to the particularities of Black self-fashioning. Her photography constitutes a long, sprawling conversation with the Black people of London.

The designer Feben—of Ethiopian heritage, raised in Sweden, and now living in London—is one collaborator for whom clothing's affordance, Johnson Artur said, is "navigation through a country you don't speak the language of," or, I might add, has not welcomed you, or threatens to deport you.

Johnson Artur and Feben met at PDA, a monthly East London club launched in 2013 by Mischa Mafia, Ms. Carrie Stacks, and Crackstevens. PDA was set up with the aim of providing a dance floor for queer and nonbinary POC dissidents to let loose amid vogue anthems and blaring edits of Celine Dion's "It's All Coming Back to Me Now" or Mariah Carey's "One Sweet Day." It is the magnetism and sticky sociality of the club that pervades Johnson Artur's photographs of Feben's work. What is on display in her images of the models backstage at Feben's show is not just a svelte Black woman in a bright halter neck and textured mid-length skirt but clothing as a vestige of belonging, the means through which Black people find themselves and find others like them.

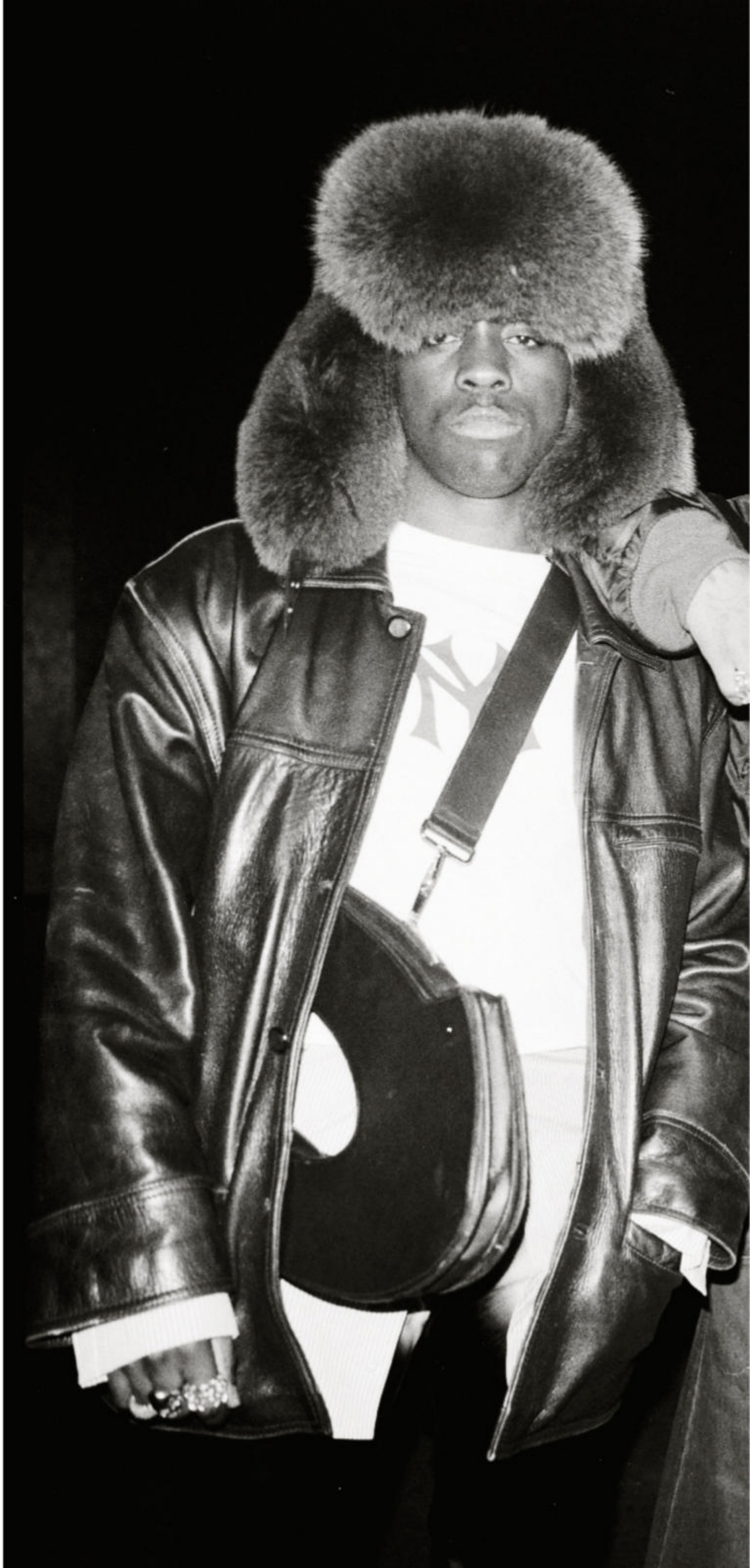
When I spoke recently with Johnson Artur about her work with designers such as Feben and Mowalola, whose T-shirted girls still haunt me, there was a large tapestry in her living room. I asked her where it is from. She responded, hazily,

Tolu Coker fashion show backstage, 2024

"from the street," or one of those markets that are abundant in parts of South London where Johnson Artur has her home and studio. Staring at the tapestry, I asked again, "Are you good at finding things, or do they tend to come to you?" Her answer: "I think it's both, you know. I've trained myself to look for things, and I think things find me too. I'm a bit of a collector." This seems to describe her photographic practice as well. It's not things she looks for but people. Photography is what gives her a "reason to go up to someone," she told me. This lifetime in search of presence has shaped a living archive of Black life in London.

Looking at a woman in a curly Farah Fawcett–style wig and bright-pink leather jumpsuit, I see myself, eighteen, about to head to university. I am, for the first time, alone in London, without my strict Nigerian parents—only an older cousin who disappears for most of the day to see his friends. He leaves my boyfriend and me to our own devices, no questions asked. Summer is nearing its end, and we arrive a few days shy of Notting Hill Carnival. I do not know where I am going or what precisely I am going to do once I get there, but I know it is important how I dressed. My hair in fluorescent silver twists, a thrifted red-and-white striped shirt, and lips stained with bright cherry-red lipstick. When I look at Johnson Artur's work, it is this implicit understanding I recognize, of the importance of dressing up as a Black person in London. The way the streets almost seem to demand it, the delight in the bright smear of eye shadow across eyelids or the flagrant display compelled by a miniskirt and bra top, the insouciance of sagging denim, the undeniable glamour of a lace frontal. Johnson Artur's photographs are devoid of the self-protective "should" I grew up with ("This is how a lady dresses," I was told). They are never bawdy, but exude a certain confidence and a lust for life, a Black jouissance.

Gazelle Mba is a Nigerian writer who is currently working on her first book.



Calvin Klein
Calvin Klein
PARED

Previous spread:
Street style at Mowalola show, 2024

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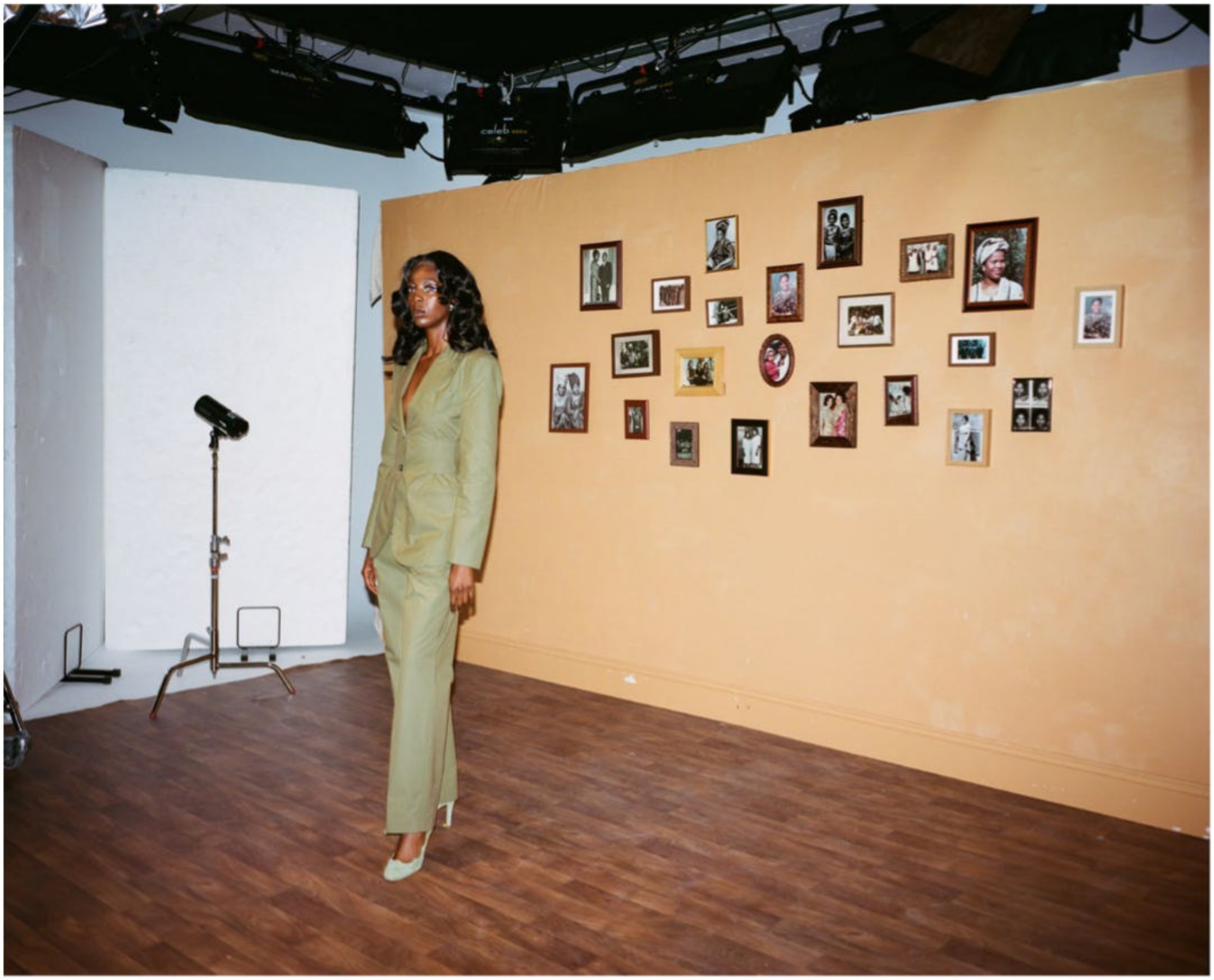
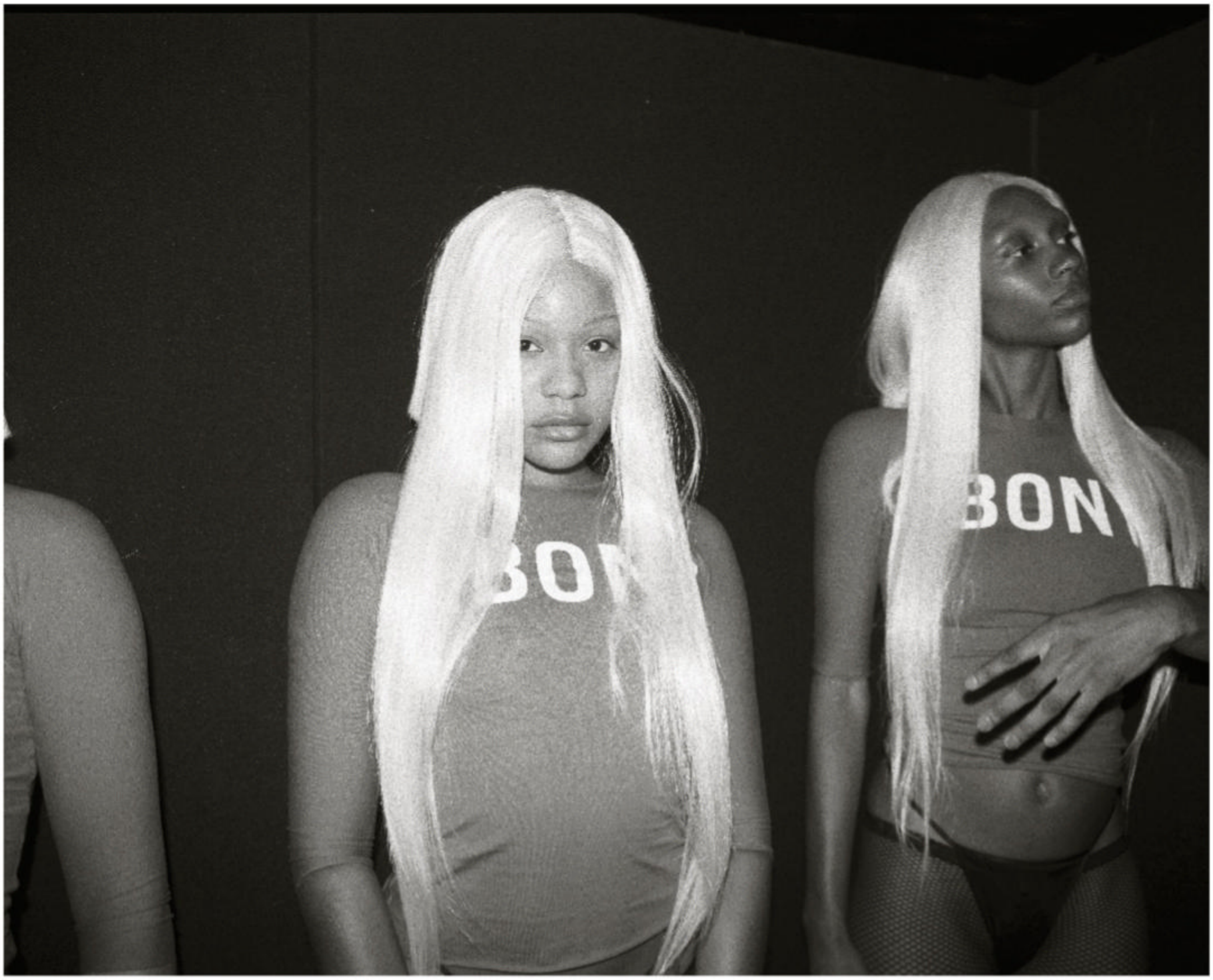
Tolu Coker fashion show backstage, 2024

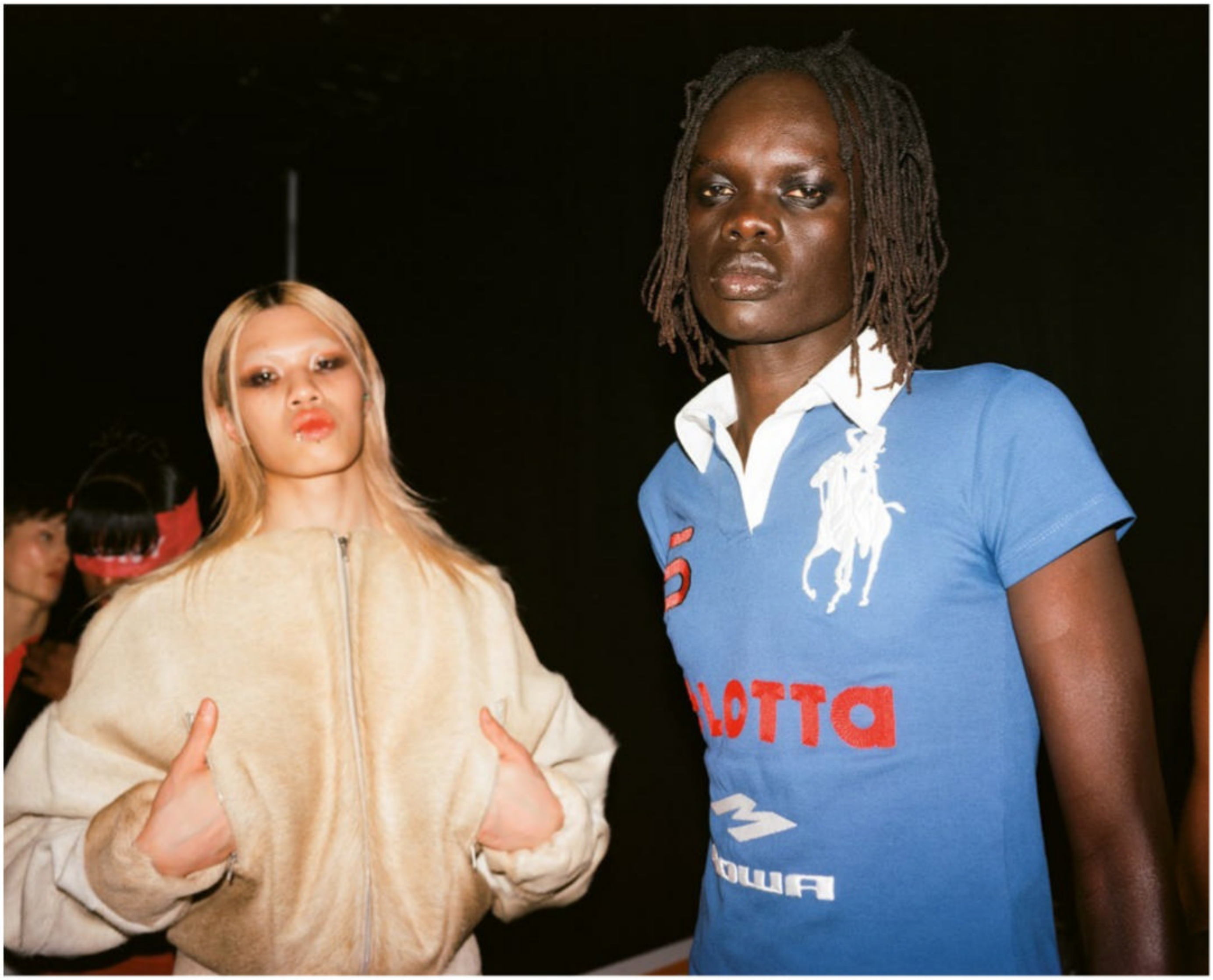


Mowalola fashion show backstage, 2024



This page:
Mowalola fashion show backstage, 2024

Opposite:
Feben fashion show backstage, 2024
All photographs courtesy the artist



Nikki Nelms
Hair Stories

madison moore

Nikki Nelms lifts hair to the level of conceptual art. In one indelible look, a zipper runs down the middle of a French roll, and who knows what kind of goodies are inside. “The zipper style was my nod to the ’90s, Detroit, down south Miami, and hair competitions,” Nelms told me recently. “Back in the day, they would add color sprays to a French roll, or trinkets. It was the ’90s, so you had to go crazy on the French roll.” It’s no wonder that 1997’s *B.A.P.S.* (Black American Princesses) is one of her favorite movies. “*B.A.P.S.* was so iconic because those styles were considered ghetto and hood—as are a lot of things we do—until it’s mainstream, and then it’s chic and high fashion.”

With collaborators who span the worlds of contemporary art, fashion, film, and music—including Mickalene Thomas, Janelle Monáe, Lorna Simpson, Deana Lawson, Solange, Arthur Jafa, and Zoë Kravitz—Nelms uses her talents to uplift the beauty of Black hair. Her lyrical, mesmerizing approach often incorporates vibrant, electrifying colors, unusual materials, and a campy, sculptural zhuzh that adds a twist and turn to the story. “Hair is such a canvas to be creative,” she said. “You can be a walking billboard of art on your own. If you don’t have a dollar, you can express yourself through your clothes, through your hair. You could put a whole palm tree in your hair if you want to.”

Born and raised in Florida, Nelms grew up surrounded by hair. “I’ve done hair since I was a little kid—third or fourth grade. I didn’t think it was a big thing because I knew so many Black girls who could do hair,” she explained. That may have been so, but she was in demand. Even at such a tender age, Nelms already had a roster of professional women coming to get a French roll. “At first, my mom couldn’t believe these adult professional women would come over and let this kid give them short haircuts.”

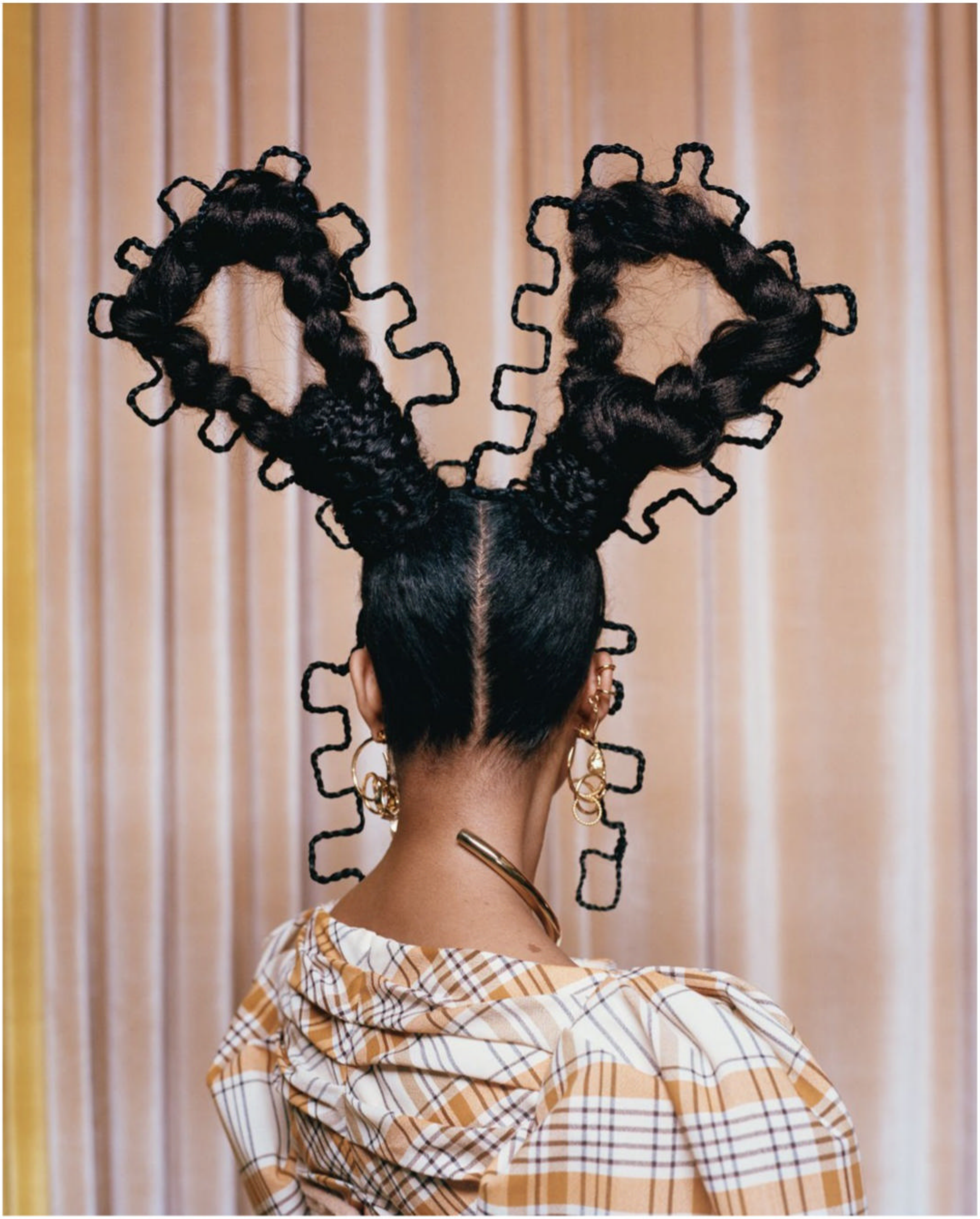
Dropping out of Florida State University to enroll in Loraines Academy, Nelms initially saw doing hair as a fallback plan. But a legendary local stylist in St. Petersburg named Donna, who ran an in-demand salon called Shear Essence, inspired her to see that another way was possible. “She was so poppin’,” Nelms said. One day, she noticed Donna featured in *Ebony* magazine and was surprised to discover that hair could be big. That something she thought was so regular and had been doing for as long as she could remember—doing hair—could be *grand*.

Nelms is not afraid to embrace imperfection, breakage, and flyaways, making hair junky by using unconventional materials sourced from vintage shops, old sewing kits, and Home Depot. In one collaboration, with the artist Lorna Simpson for *Vogue*, the model’s plaits are punctuated with the rhythms of trinkets, jewels, and other whatnots. In another, colorful spools of thread are added to the hair as a reimagining of beaded styles—“the ultimate sew-in,” she called it.

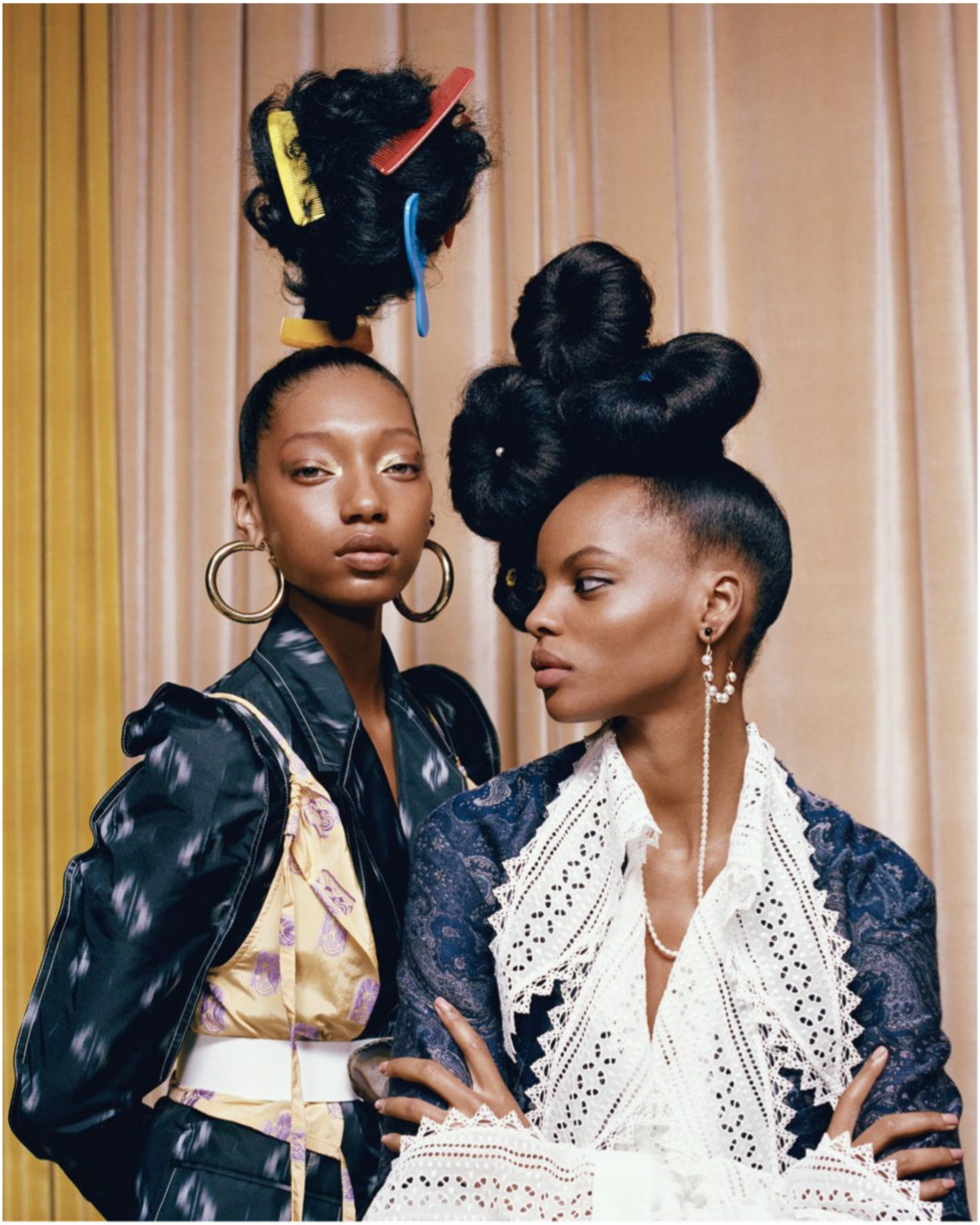
What defines Nelms’s boundless *flava* is making something she wants to see, a love for constructing beauty in unexpected ways. There’s a nervousness that comes when working with new, experimental ideas. “But *that* is what you have to lean into if you want to create,” she told me.

One look for *Allure* says it all. Styled in less than ten minutes, it consists of red, blue, and yellow combs stuck into a high, gravity-defying ponytail, fluffy like cotton candy. “The shoot was supposed to be an earring story, it wasn’t supposed to be a hair feature,” she said. “But I love for hair to take over! I could see a mother wanting art in her daughter’s room, and this picture might be the thing that she goes to bed seeing at night. Hair is the best art.”

madison moore is the author of *Fabulous: The Rise of the Beautiful Eccentric* (2018) and an assistant professor of modern culture and media at Brown University.



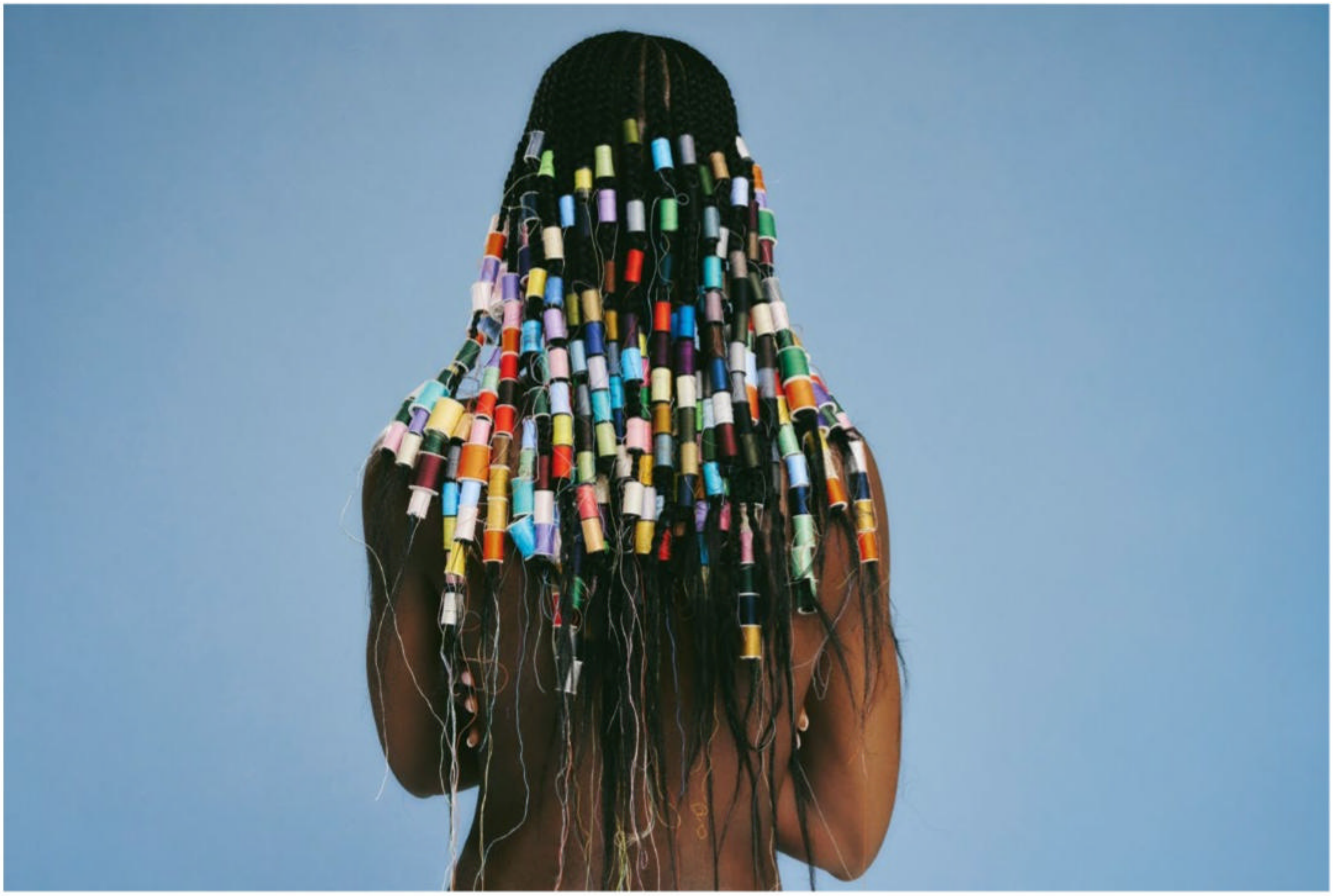
Sharif Hamza for *Allure*, 2020
Courtesy the artist

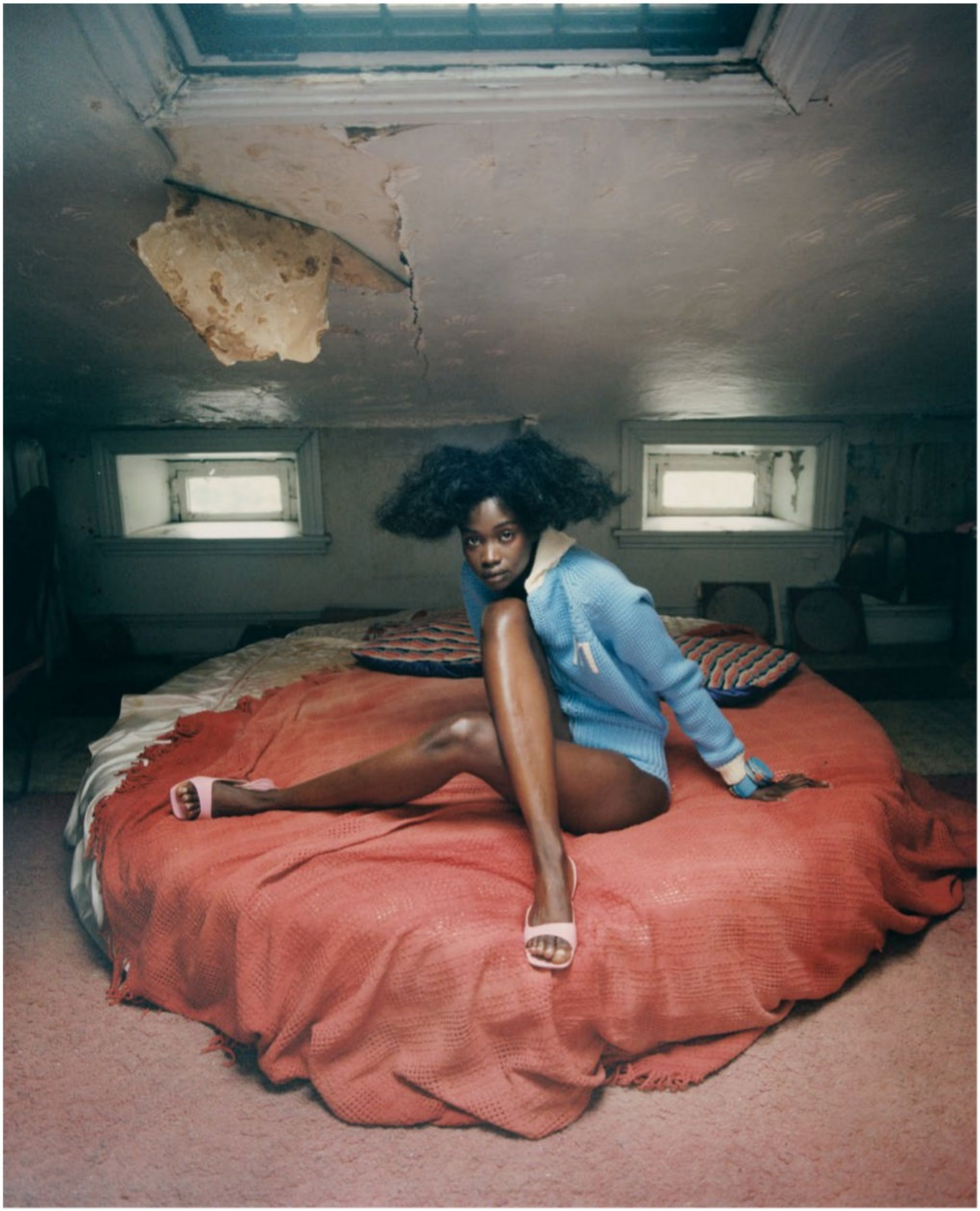


This page:
Sharif Hamza for *Allure*, 2020; opposite: Ming Smith for *i-D*, 2021
Courtesy the artists

NYC.

This page and opposite: Adrienne Raquel for Aritzia, 2024, and for *Allure*, 2023
Courtesy the artist





This page:
Renell Medrano for *Elle*, 2020
Courtesy the artist

Opposite:
Lorna Simpson for *Vogue*, 2017
© the artist and courtesy Hauser & Wirth

Melina Matsoukas The Director

A Conversation with Solange Knowles

Melina Matsoukas has made a lasting mark on visual culture as the director of unforgettable music videos—among them Rihanna's "We Found Love" and Beyoncé's "Formation"—and the 2019 feature film *Queen & Slim*, which bends the romance outlaw genre into an utterly contemporary meditation on police brutality and Black love.

In some ways, though, it feels like Matsoukas is just getting started. The Los Angeles–based polymath is currently developing a flurry of passion projects (the only projects she does), among them adapting a legendary female mobster's life for the screen and documenting her own experience as a new mother. On top of everything, Matsoukas also runs De La Revolución, a bicoastal collective of photographers and directors that she founded in 2021 as an alternative to exploitative models of inclusion in the creative sphere.

Solange Knowles, the singer-songwriter, recently sat down with Matsoukas for the "Barbara Walters treatment," interviewing her friend and collaborator about her expansive image making across the fields of photography, music, television, commercials, and film.

Solange Knowles: **One of the powerful things about an image is that it lives far beyond us, forever. At what age did you understand the gravity of image making?**

Melina Matsoukas: I was raised by freedom fighters. My parents were part of a socialist movement called the Progressive Labor Party, and I was raised to create change and incite dialogue, to challenge the status quo and how people think. I always felt like I had this purpose to do these things and honor my family and the people that empowered me. I just didn't know what the tool or medium would be to do that.

In high school, I started dabbling in photography. My father was an amateur photographer, and he introduced me to the power of the lens and the idea of documentation and what that can do as a tool in the revolution. And then, when I got to college—I went to New York University—I really started understanding the reach and the scope and the conversation and the story you could create with the photograph, and understanding the power of filmmaking to reach the world and to give voice to the unheard, to document communities that we don't necessarily see all the time, and use that power to unify people. That felt like my purpose.

SK: **I love this origin story. I didn't know your father was an amateur photographer.**

MM: He's going through all his slides now, thousands of slides of our family and friends, and just our lives. It's so beautiful to have that archive.

SK: **I think a lot about the photographs that you took in Cuba in 2001 and how personal and intimate and special they are, and the gravity they hold. Although, obviously, your style has evolved and changed, I still see the *loving, tender, and attentive gaze* of how you see Black women—and have always seen Black women—in those images, celebrating their strength and vulnerability, but also allowing them to just be. I wonder how your adult self sees those images.**

MM: NYU had a summer exchange program where I went to Cuba and studied photography for a summer. That was

DA GAL YA CAN REALLY DANCE."

Page 72:
Melina Matsoukas, 2025
Photograph by Alexander Saladrigas for *Aperture*

This spread:
Andre D. Wagner, for Melina Matsoukas's "Precious Cargo" campaign, Levi's, 2023

actually my first time in Cuba, my first time returning to my mother's homeland. It was an incredible experience to be able to take that camera and have the courage to photograph people—and learning how to do that and thinking of Ming Smith and Gordon Parks and Anthony Barboza, all these people who have documented our history. I remember being shy, and not wanting to essentially steal these images of people without asking permission. But then, it's a hard dance to play. You ask permission and then people start posing, and that's not necessarily what you want. Anyway, I was able to really hone the skill of being a street photographer there.

At the same time, I had this other side of me, and I still do, where I like fashion and celebrating Black women and bodies, and embracing our sexuality and our beauty. One of my main goals in life is to change the idea of what traditional beauty looks like in our culture. I was also able to photograph some of my friends and the people that were on the trip with me, and other Cuban women. I did a series of nudes, I remember.

SK: **And some pregnant women.**

MM: Yes, that was a friend of mine. When I look back at those pictures, I feel like, Oh, they're very amateur. It was definitely part of my journey to understand the technicality of how to take a photograph. But there's a lot of themes in that work that have continued and evolved through my career, which seems pretty evident, in terms of how I look at Black women and try to celebrate them and honor the role that they've played in my life and my artistry.

SK: **When you talk about the song and dance between the gaze and the lens, and also finding that trust with people to capture them authentically, I often think about our first time—well, second time—working together, which was the video for "Losing You," and being in South Africa, and us wanting to enter the continent with as much sensitivity as possible. When you pull out the camera, you feel definitely a little shy or hesitant in some ways. But as soon as the cameras came out, the *sapeurs* came to life. I know from being on the other side of the lens, sometimes the photographer can have all of the technical skills in the world,**

the best lighting, the best set design, or can capture on an expert level—but if the synergy is not there and I don't feel comfortable or safe, then my jaw is tight and it's clenched, and you can see that in the image. Are there any specific skill sets you bring to the experience to have people put their guard down and feel safe with you to capture them at their most vulnerable and authentic?

MM: I think the key to that, and to my success, is humility and respect for the subject. My job has always been to tell someone else's story. It's never to tell my story. I'm trying to document and bring out somebody else's influences and feelings and values and inspirations. So it never begins or ends with me.

SK: **I think that you are one of the best commercial directors of our generation, and I know it's really difficult to find a way to maintain a sense of authenticity and integrity and even spirituality when working with commerce and the idea of selling something. It's something that I actually have thought a lot about in my practice, because in our creative industries, people sneer or frown upon commercial work, despite the gravity to storytelling and the incredible ways that you can use commercial work to tell stories. That's something that I'm fascinated by.**

What is your approach to commercial work? And how do you choose the projects that you wish to be a part of?

MM: I was so influenced by pop culture, with MTV and music videos and, honestly, with commercials. I always wanted to start on music videos. In my younger years, I definitely did things just to pay bills. But at one point in my career, I was like, I can't do this anymore; it's not worth enough to work on things I'm not passionate about.

So in my commercial work, I try to find brands or stories that I believe in. And with commercial work, the reach is so much greater because of the money behind it. I find that it's actually a great way to create change. When we talk about changing what the standard of beauty is, that's created by commercials—commercial advertising and what you see on television and all of that. So in order to be a part of that dialogue, you have to actually enter that dialogue.

I try not to get too product heavy. I hate shooting products, so that's kind of a deal breaker for me. But I love to tell stories. I made a Levi's commercial two years ago, in Jamaica. I'm part Jamaican, and they sent me a story of how Levi's in the '70s made its way to Jamaica, and these people made it their own, and it was kind of the staple of reggae and dancehall, and the role that denim played in that culture. I felt such closeness to that subject matter and that era and time and that visual language.

SK: **I want to use that as a segue into De La Revolución and talk about how you have transitioned not only as a businesswoman and an agency but as a mentor to emerging directors and photographers, and what that day-to-day looks like for you, how that's changed the way that you approach your own work. Tell us more about that.**

Opposite:
Ming Smith, *Sun Ra, Space II, New York*, 1978
Courtesy the artist

This page:
Still from Melina Matsoukas's music video for Solange Knowles's "Losing You," 2012
Courtesy the artist

> I always felt like I had this purpose to do these things and honor my family and the people that empowered me.

MM: So I did a film called *Queen & Slim*. I fought really hard to bring in four different photographers to shoot alongside me as I was making that film, to interpret the film in a way that was different than what I was shooting. One of them was Andre Wagner. He's an amazing, primarily street, photographer. I call him our generation's Gordon Parks. I also invited the incredibly talented photographer Lelanie Foster, who was there the whole time. She's my cousin, too, so that helps. She was able to photograph the actors and the behind-the-scenes, and have access in a way that I thought was just so powerful. I brought Awol Erizku there a couple times to take objects from the film that symbolize the story and create still lifes around them.

I loved the idea of this collective coming together to tell one story. I thought back to the Kamoinge Workshop, the Black collective in the '60s. Anthony Barboza was part of it, Ming Smith, Shawn Walker, Daniel Dawson, Jimmie Mannas, and many others.

In my journey, I've gone from photography to music videos, to commercials, to narrative and film, to TV—and they're all very separated. There's not a lot of crossover in terms of the people you work with, and the crew. They like to keep it so segregated. I hate that, because obviously there's incredible crossover. So being a part of this collective during my film inspired me to create a space that actually helps guide directors and photographers in their goals and what they want to achieve.

De La Revolución was born of a time when people were starting to exploit Black artists, and feeling like, Oh, I want to have this person on my roster because they're Black, and I want them to shoot Black people, but I have no understanding of the culture, I don't care about who this is profiting, where it's going, I just want to check a box. I wanted to provide a safe space that felt more like community, a collective of support and empowerment. So that's why I started De La Revolución over one banner. My mother is from Cuba and was a child of the revolution, so I feel like I'm a child of the revolution in ways that I've inherited from her.

SK: **I'm so proud of you and what you've done with . . . would you call it an agency? A studio?**

MM: It's all of that. Agency, studio, production company, collective, whatever you want it to be. That's family. That's who we are.

SK: **It's been incredible to watch it unfold. Thinking about *Queen & Slim*,**

Anthony Barboza, Portrait of Beverly Johnson, 1970s
Courtesy Getty Images

and the world that you created not only with just the film but with the music and with the style and with the rollout and the stills, what have you learned from that process of world making and the importance of the space that surrounds the film just as much as the film itself?

MM: That was an incredibly challenging journey, creating the film. I didn't realize it, because I had never done a film, that the way that you market it is just as important to the success of the film as the film itself. So for me, it actually was a way that I was able to take what I felt my skill set was and bring it all together. Obviously, I started in music, so the music's going to be really important. The collaborative nature of filmmaking is what I truly enjoy and flourish in, and is one of the reasons I became a filmmaker. So to have all these different, incredible artists involved in the making, but also the rollout, of the film was really important, and it felt important to stay true to the messaging behind the film.

We wanted to make sure our community had access to the film first. So we had a screening at the Underground Museum in LA and the Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York before it was out, and we focused on Black publications and journalists first before we brought it to the broader audience.

SK: **I'm curious how at this stage, after your success with *Insecure* and *The***

This page: Photographer unknown, Portrait of Madame Stephanie St. Clair, 1930
Courtesy Bettmann/Getty Images

Opposite: Andre D. Wagner, Still from Melina Matsoukas, *Queen & Slim*, 2019
Courtesy the artist

I would like to see that renaissance not be a renaissance, but just be a standard.

***Changeling*, you decide on other projects you want to pursue.**

MM: I'm working on a lot of things. I'm developing a film based on Marlon James's novel *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (2014), which is a story that takes place in '70s Jamaica and moves to '80s New York—two periods that are very important to me in my life and my artistry. I'm working on a film on Stephanie St. Clair, who was this West Indian woman who ran Harlem during the Harlem Renaissance and protected it from white mobsters. It's a gangster flick about this incredible woman who has been erased from history. And I'm working on a TV show on Jack Johnson, who was the first Black heavyweight boxing champion—he's from Galveston, your place—with HBO. That's a series. There's a bunch of other projects that are in the works that I hope will come to fruition in the next couple of years. I'm also working on raising my baby and documenting that journey of motherhood and life.

SK: **I love seeing you as a mother to Charli, and I'm very excited to see how that will impact and influence your work in your lens as well—because I know that it will.**

I had a few other questions. My favorite moment, among my top three Melina moments, was *Master of None*'s "Thanksgiving" episode. The fact that you created such iconography with one episode.

MM: I never really wanted to do episodic work because I like to create the world from inception. But Lena Waithe is a very persistent person, and she really wanted me to direct this episode of *Master of None*, which was a bottle episode about her character coming out as a lesbian to her mother, played by Angela Bassett. The story is told through several Thanksgivings, from childhood to adulthood. Like I say with everybody, "Send me the script or the song or whatever it is, and if I love it, I'll do it." And I fell in love with the script.

SK: **I love that about your work, that no matter what the medium is you have such a distinctive fingerprint. Whether it's a music video, a film, just one episode, or a photograph, we can quickly identify that it is your language.**

My last question is about the power of image making through the lens of Blackness. I feel like there was a renaissance in photography and filmmaking of Black artists, but that renaissance was through the gaze of whiteness and white validation. It's been really interesting to see this moment in 2020 when everybody was running out to prove that they saw us and that they valued us in one way or another. What do you think the future looks like for Black artists, Black filmmakers, Black photographers in this space? And what would you like to see the world look like and evolve into?

MM: I feel like there was a renaissance when I was growing up, when there were these beautiful Black films and filmmakers that were actually kind of blacklisted afterward, like Julie Dash, Darnell Martin, Theodore Witcher, and Ernest Dickerson, to name a few. And then, yes, around 2020 or 2019, there was another renaissance for Black film,

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AUTO REPAIR

and a lot of what maybe you can call white guilt about the systemic racism within filmmaking. People were trying to move against it, which was necessary. There was a lot more space for Black stories and for those to be told by Black artists. Now a lot of people are reverting back to their racist ways, and they're like, We never really felt differently, and now we don't have that same pressure, and we can go back to excluding Black and people of color from this conversation, and denying access to them. Honestly, this last year has been very difficult, even for me, to get projects made that are about people of color. Many of my projects have been dropped.

I would like to see that change. I would like to see that renaissance not be a renaissance, but just be a standard. I will continue to make room for artists of color involved in filmmaking and stills and image making, period. But I think it's also about creating that access and us being on the other side of it. I was just talking about working on a film on Stephanie St. Clair, which I had taken to a bunch of people, and nobody was interested in making it until I took it to this Black executive who was looking for a gangster film that centered on a Black woman, and she was very excited about it—and now, we're developing that together and getting it made. A lot of other people who I have great relationships with just didn't see the value or the idea that that has appeal to an audience—of any color. So it's important that we're on the other side. It's important that we're creating our own platforms, so that we're creating these opportunities, and having ownership on the business and the decision-making side of things, and are on some of these boards. Until that happens, we are relinquishing the power to control our image, which is really upsetting.

SK: **Well, we look to you.**

MM: Thanks. I mean, I'm going to keep on fighting the good fight. And I will continue standing on the shoulders of many who came before me, who fought that good fight, and be influenced by them and their work, and even stand arm in arm with my fellow comrades, you being one of them, and creating Black art, and archiving it, and creating space for other Black artists, and collaborating with each other. And, also, just being able to be a cheerleader at times and showing that there's value to our stories and our image, and we need that. That's what feeds us. And it's not just us. It's the world. I feel like, especially as African Americans, our greatest commodity is our culture, and it has been shipped around the world and appropriated, and we need to regain ownership of it. And you are very much a part of that story. One of the things I love most about you is not only your art but your appreciation for our artists and our stories and the idea that we have to own them and own that history and also protect it. That's what we need to do.

SK: **Yes. We can end it with the words of the great NeNe Leakes: We see each other!**

MM: Exactly.

Solange Knowles is a singer, songwriter, and actress.

Nuits Balnéaires *Côte d'Ivoire Dreaming*

Tiana Reid

Opposite and following spread:
From *Infinite Stories* for Yua Hair, 2024

Pages 86–87:
From *Dreaming, Ivory Coast*, 2020

Page 88:
***Keren Lasme et Noella Elloh, Ivory Coast*, 2018**

Page 89:
***Guy Martial, Ivory Coast*, 2018**

Pages 90–91:
***La Fleur D'Appolonie* (Scent of Appolonia), 2021**
All photographs courtesy the artist

A slinky crease of a jacket, a streetlight lurking in the background, marbles resting in the scoop of a collarbone, flowers forming a shadow on a model's face. These intense details of light, shape, and form heighten an atmosphere of crepuscular intimacy in the brooding and buoyant images of Nuits Balnéaires, a photographer, musician, filmmaker, poet, and set designer based in Grand-Bassam, Ivory Coast.

Nuits Balnéaires's interest in photography can be traced back to some high school modeling he did casually for friends. "In that age, it was the boom of Facebook," he told me recently. "It was all about doing cool photos for social media." When his mother came back from a trip with a compact Sony camera, he began to make his own pictures. This eventually led him to the fashion industry —magazines, advertising, brand photography, as well as deep admiration for the know-how of local artists and designers in Abidjan, Accra, Lagos, and Dakar. "It was a great environment to learn," he said. "But at some point, I had that need to focus on more personal stories."

After moving in 2019 from his former home in Abidjan (Ivory Coast's de facto capital) to a new-to-him scene in the small, historic town of Grand-Bassam, Nuits Balnéaires was renewed by nature. His embrace of landscape is evident in depictions of soft water bathed in twilight. After all, the moniker *Nuits Balnéaires* translates to "seaside nights" in English and is also meant to provoke what he refers to as an "idea of nostalgia, this melancholy of the Gulf of Guinea, this strong relationship to memory."

In Grand-Bassam, he created a meditative series called *Scent of Appolonia* (2021), in which he pays homage to the land of the N'zima Kôtôkô people, an ethnic group of southwestern Ghana and southeastern Ivory Coast. "I was very interested about the link between those territories and the resilience and the sustainability of this whole culture, despite the borders that we inherited from the colonial era," he explained. "These people still coexist, still share things, even if they exist in those two lands and are separated by these borders."

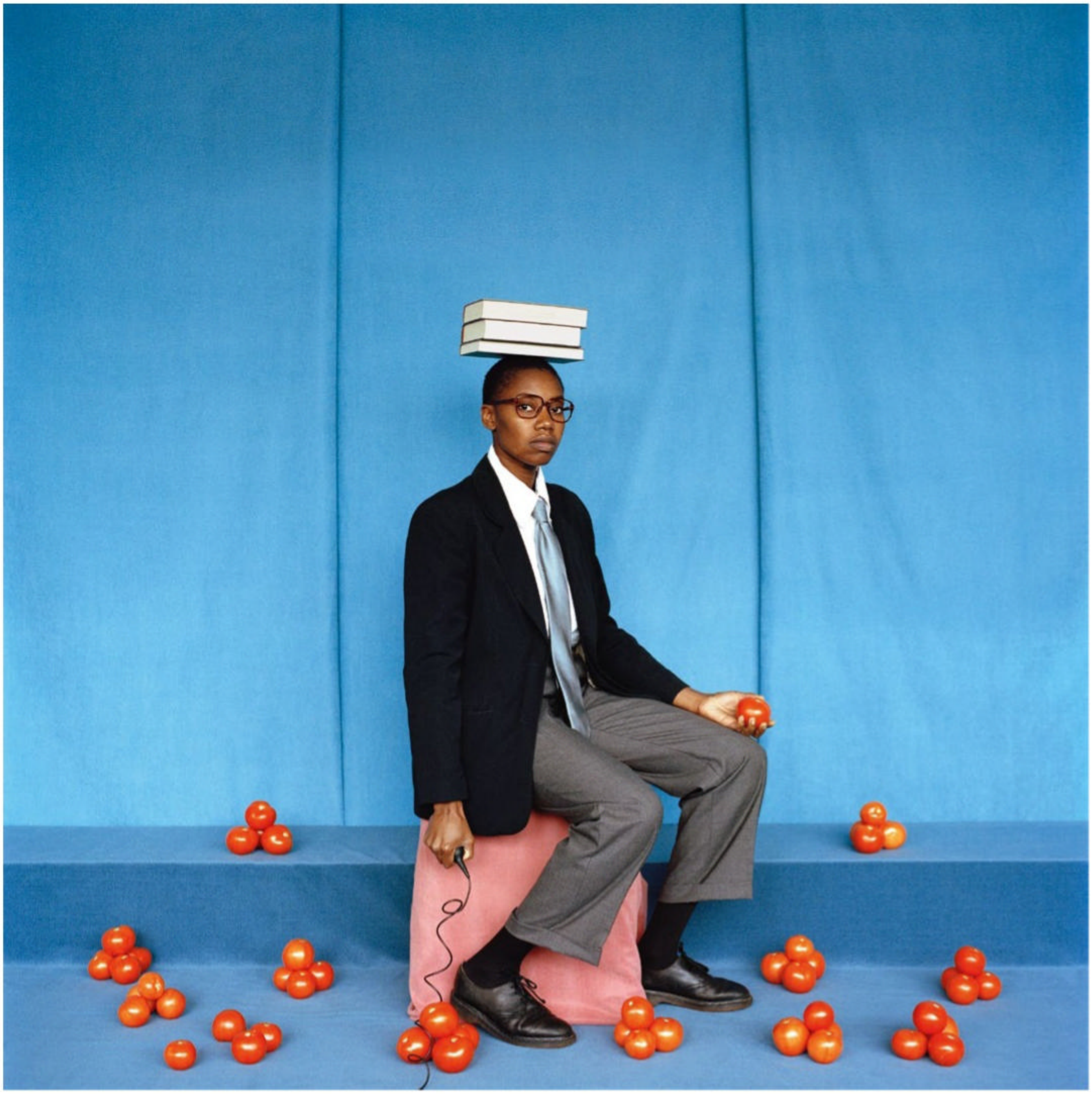
Nuits Balnéaires's interventions, then, mark a wider community. His subjects include friends, professional models, and family. "I work a lot with my sister, who

is definitely my main muse," he said.

Another series stems from a partnership with a curatorial platform, Yua Hair, which focuses on textured hair in Africa and the African diaspora. These exquisitely staged photographs take their inspiration from 1960s and 1970s West African studio portraiture, where self-fashioning was understood as a political act within Africa's postcolonial cultures. A relentless respect for fashion, tailoring, jewelry, craft, and aesthetics are, to Nuits Balnéaires, "a way to really reclaim that identity which is strongly African, but also with a lightness that equals an openness to the world, to this contemporary world, to this global world in which we exist today."

While Nuits Balnéaires's crisp and ecstatic images suggest an homage to iconic West African photographic practices, they also attempt to forge ahead, naming and creating a contemporary culture that is specific to his community in Ivory Coast but encouraged by friends in Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Europe, and the United States. "I feel like I've been so nourished and built up by the space I come from and its people," he said with pride. "I think I've been lucky."

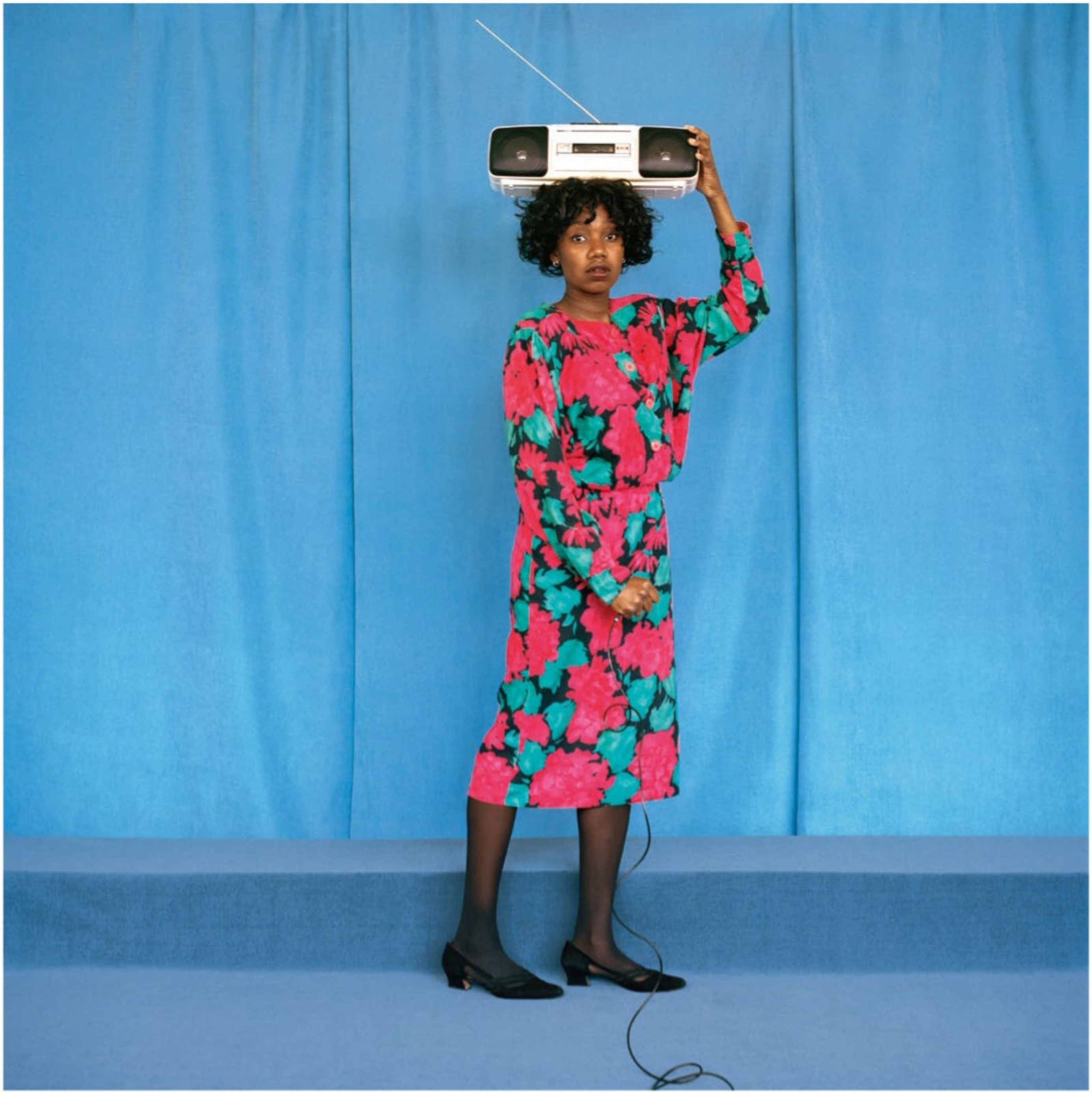
Tiana Reid is an assistant professor in the Department of English at York University.



Silvia Rosi
Family Album

Vanessa Peterson

Silvia Rosi picked up photography in her teenage years, documenting friends and family in the northern Italian region of Reggio Emilia, to which her parents had immigrated from Togo in the late 1980s. Rosi's own move from Italy to England, to attend the photography program at the London College of Communication from 2013 to 2016, instigated a period of introspection about what it means to leave home and put down roots elsewhere. The feeling of being between cultures is at the heart of her practice.



“I was going back to my memories of Italy and looking back at images in family albums that would reconnect me with a sense of my identity,” she told me recently. Far from her familial networks, Rosi, who is still based in London, turned the lens on herself. “You use what you have at hand,” she noted with a wry smile.

From the series *Disintegrata* (Disintegrated, 2024), the image *Disintegrata con Foto di Famiglia* (Disintegrated with Family Photo) shows Rosi standing between two wooden cabinets with framed photographs placed on them. The pictures—a woman in a wedding dress, family snapshots, a black-and-white studio portrait—suggest the ways vernacular photography has been used in the African diaspora as a means of documenting lives in transit. Her work also speaks to visual and oral modes of memory and transmission in family lineages. In *Self-Portrait as My Father* (2019), Rosi sits on a chair against a blue backdrop, balancing books on her head, wearing glasses and a formal shirt, tie, and trousers, like a clerk about to

Opposite:
Self-Portrait as My Father,
2019

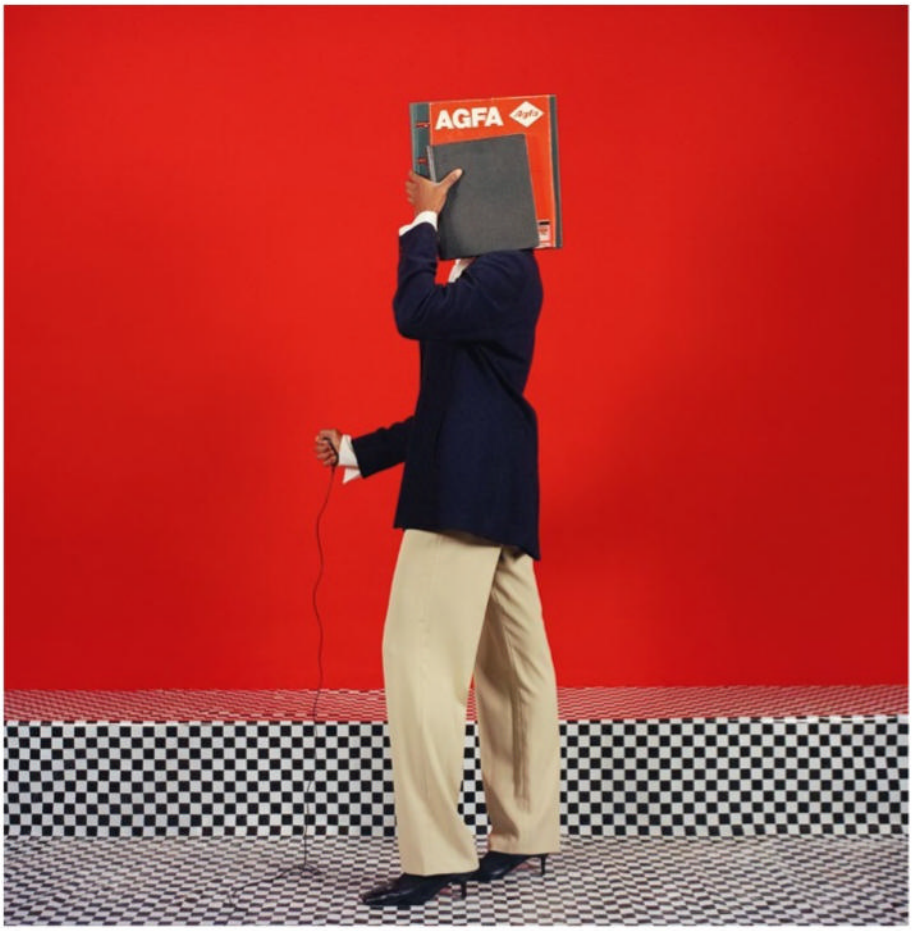
This page:
Self-Portrait as My Mother,
2019

head to the office. On the ground next to her feet are tomatoes stacked in small pyramids. Here, Rosi steps into the metaphorical shoes of her father, whom she never met, filling in the gaps between his physical absence and the stories passed down about him by her mother. Though he arrived in Italy an educated man, Rosi said, "I know that when my father lived in Italy, he worked as a tomato picker. He ended up being part of the exploitation of migrants. This happened in the late 1980s, but it is also something that is still happening now."

In *Self-Portrait as My Mother in School Uniform* (2019), Rosi carries toothpicks, reminiscences of the items her mother sold at roadsides and markets to passersby as a young trader in Togo, as her mother's mother had before her. Styled in clothing similar to her mother's school uniform, with books placed on her lap and her gaze fixed firmly on the viewer, Rosi inhabits the vulnerable yet entrepreneurial spirit of her mother as a young woman before motherhood. In another image, *Self-Portrait as My Mother* (2019), Rosi carries a radio on her head—a reference to highlife and Afro jazz but also a symbol of a deeply personal memory of her mother's.

"The radio represents a moment when my mother was working for an Italian family. She overheard on the radio that a law would be passed that would legalize migrants present in Italian territory at that time, which enabled my parents to stay and live in Italy," Rosi explained. Style and clothing, much of it sourced from secondhand shops, are key to Rosi's work. In her inhabitations, the glasses or suit her father wore transcend their status as middle-class signifiers to become objects imbued with private meanings. Shutter release cables snake across the floor and lead to the hand of the artist, as if to show she is in complete control.

Rosi's recent work is openly indebted to West African studio photographers such as Seydou Keïta and Malick Sidibé, who helped visualize a kind of postindependence modernity. In one photograph, *Disintegrata di Profilo* (Disintegrated Profile, 2024), the artist, clad in a preppy blazer and khakis, poses with an Agfa-Gevaert book: an apparent reference to the legendary photographer James Barnor, who moved from London back to his nat-ive Ghana in 1970 to set up the first Agfa color-processing laboratory in the country. Rosi holds the book up to obscure her face, as if to resist the camera's capacity to fix identity in place.

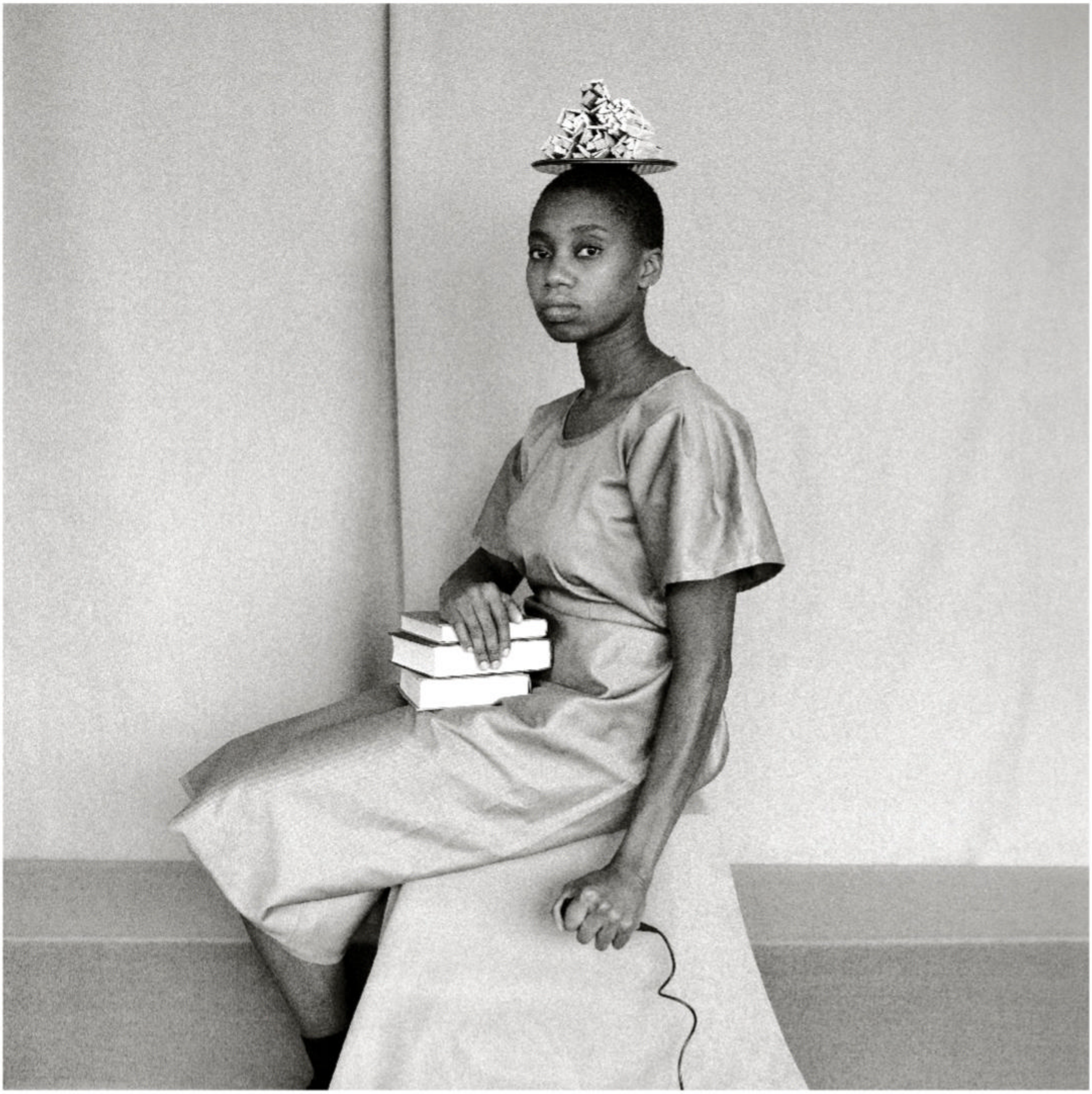


Disintegrata di Profilo
(Disintegrated profile), 2024

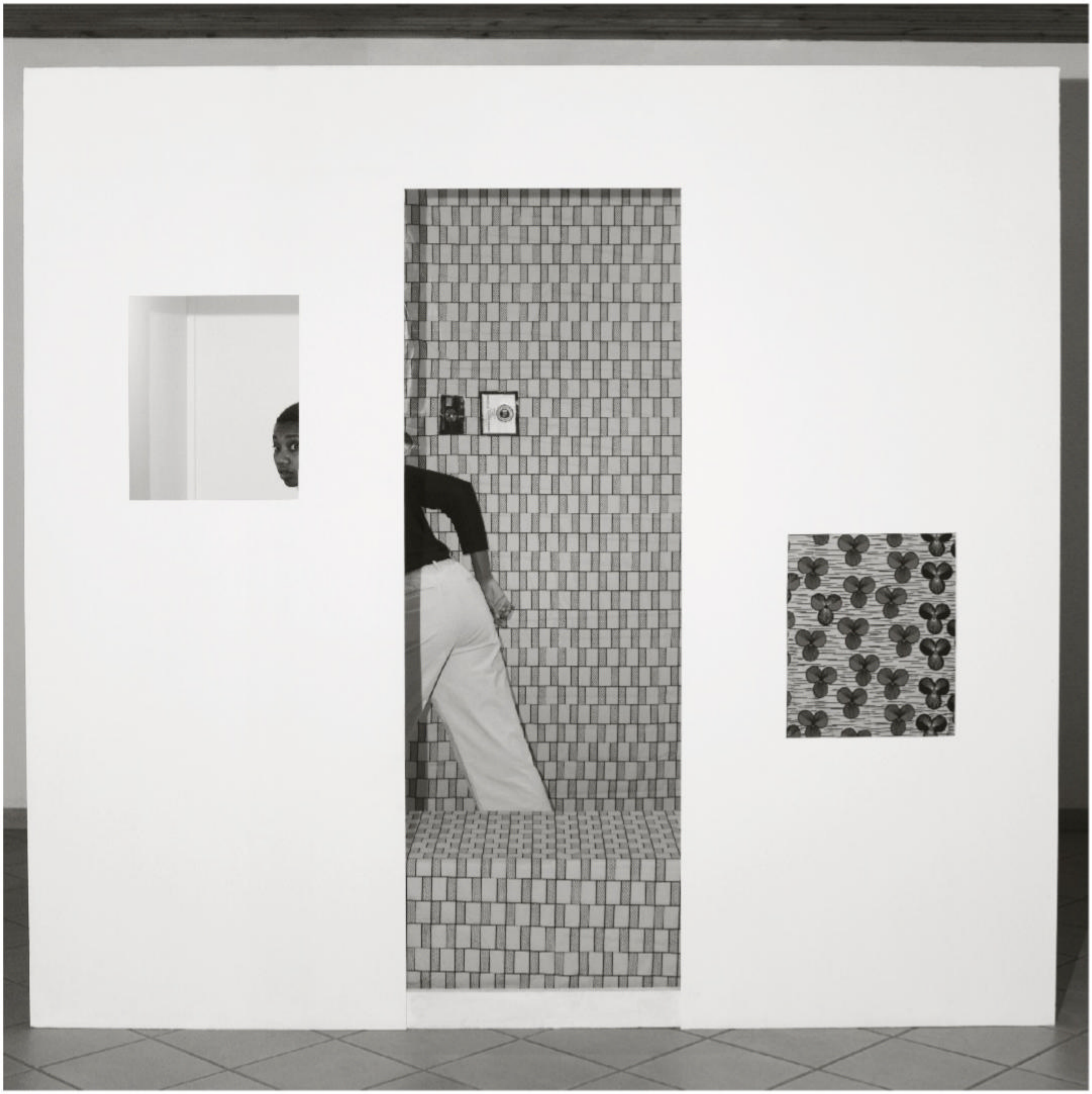
In bringing together the performative elements of self-portraiture and the commitment to preservation found in family albums, Rosi stages a different kind of performance, similar to the ways in which Samuel Fosso used his own body in the 2008 series *African Spirits* to perform and embody famous pan-African figures, including Patrice Lumumba and Kwame Nkrumah. Rather than reaching toward historical personages, Rosi emulates those who aren't written about, the lives of immigrants trying to establish themselves in a new country in the face of economic precarity and cultural dislocation. Her images beautifully highlight tender, painful feelings of misrecognition and alienation, and the difficulties of starting anew.

Vanessa Peterson is a writer based in London and a senior editor at *Frieze*.

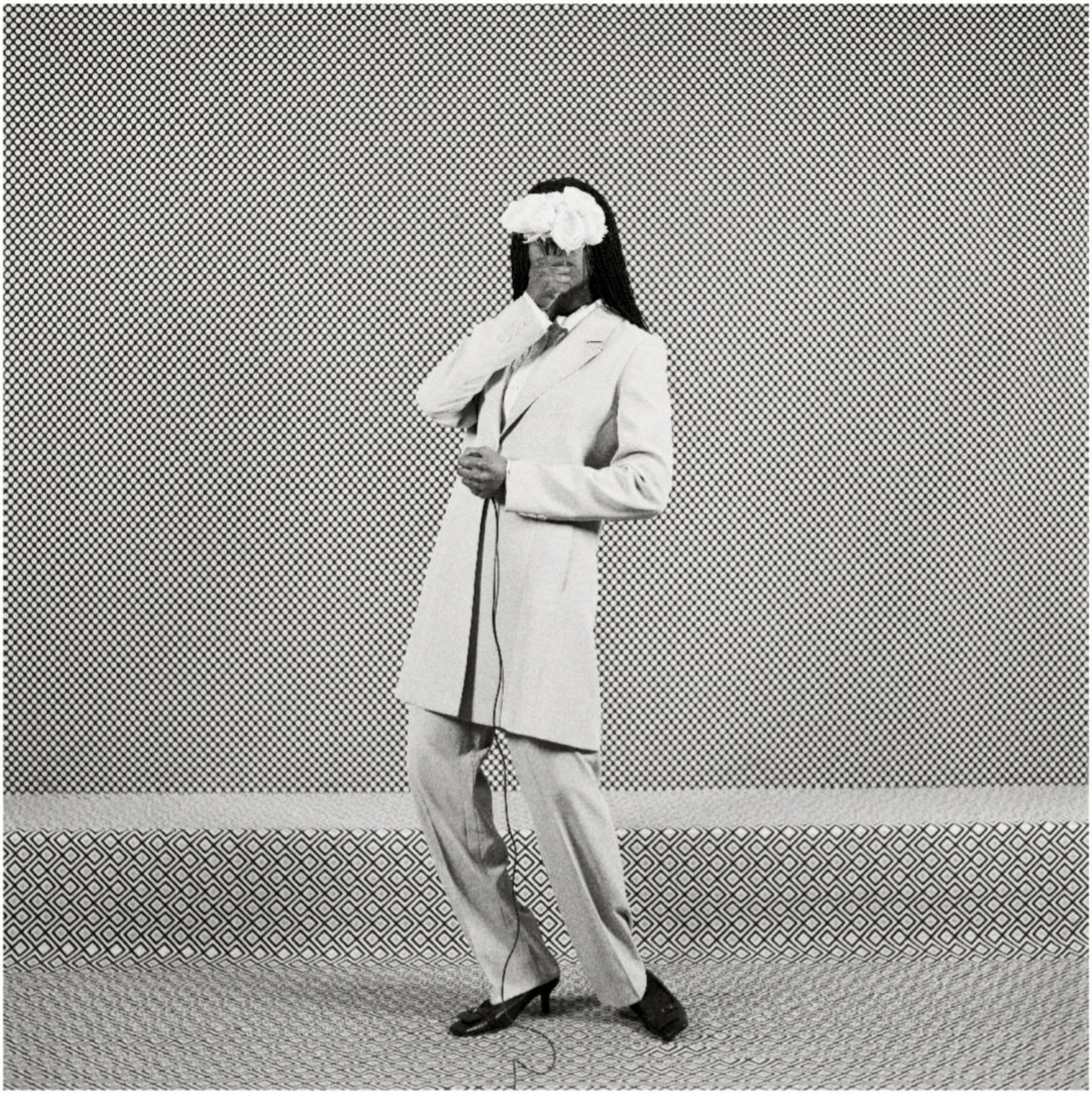
Self-Portrait as My Mother in School Uniform, 2019



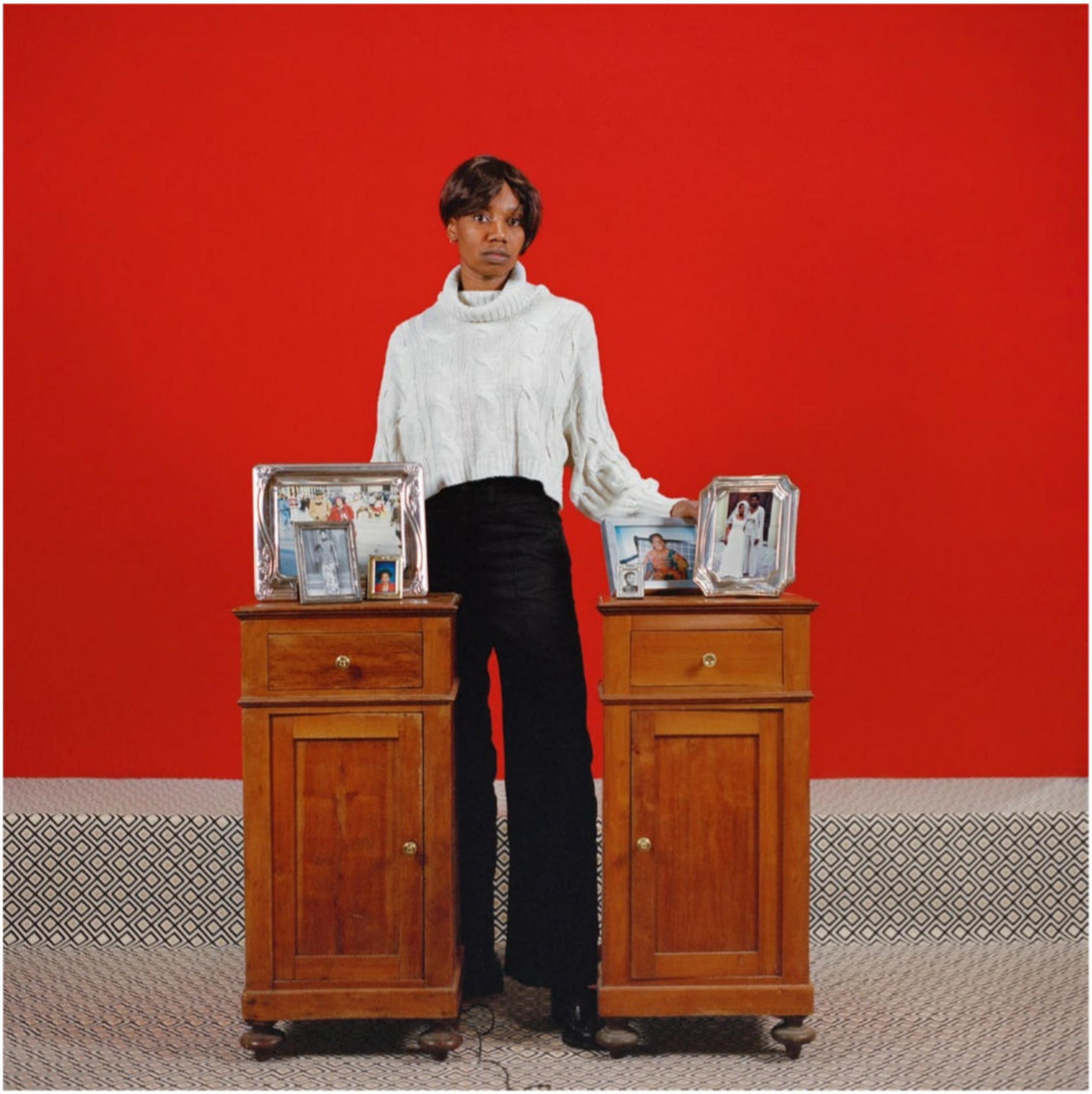
Neither Could Exist Alone, 2021



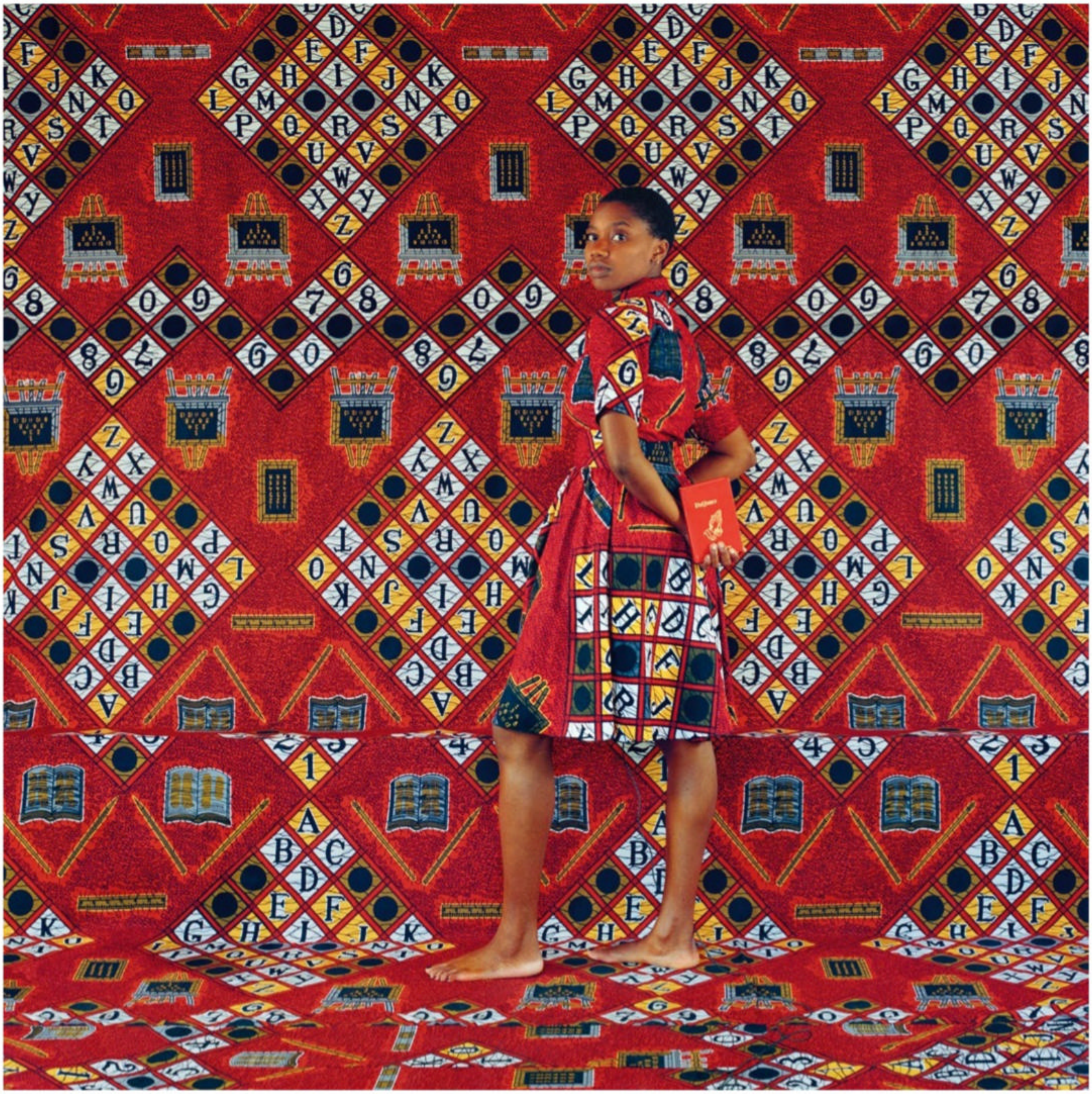
Sposa Italiana Disintegrata
(Disintegrated Italian
bride), 2024



***Disintegrata con Foto di Famiglia* (Disintegrated with family photo), 2024**



***ABC VLISCO 14/0017,* 2022**
All photographs courtesy Autograph APB, Collezione Maramotti, MAXXI and Bvlgari, and Jerwood Arts/Photobooks



Sunglasses by Christian Roth. Silver metallic bikini by Ecko Red. Stockings by Gerbe. Pony skin boots by Figueroa for Robert Best. All diamond jewelry by Jacob the Jeweler.

PRINCE

Silk organza shirt with train by Givenchy. Wristbands, Lady Foot Locker. Thong by Victoria's Secret.

The beautiful ones stay smooth with Olay Visible Anti-Aging Total Effects Body Moisturizing Treatment.

Top:
Spread from *Honey*, June/July 2002, with photographs by Marc Baptiste

Bottom:
Spread from *Honey*, December/January 2001, with photograph by Marc Baptiste

Turning the Page

In the early 2000s, Honey *magazine mixed hip-hop, street style, and high fashion.*

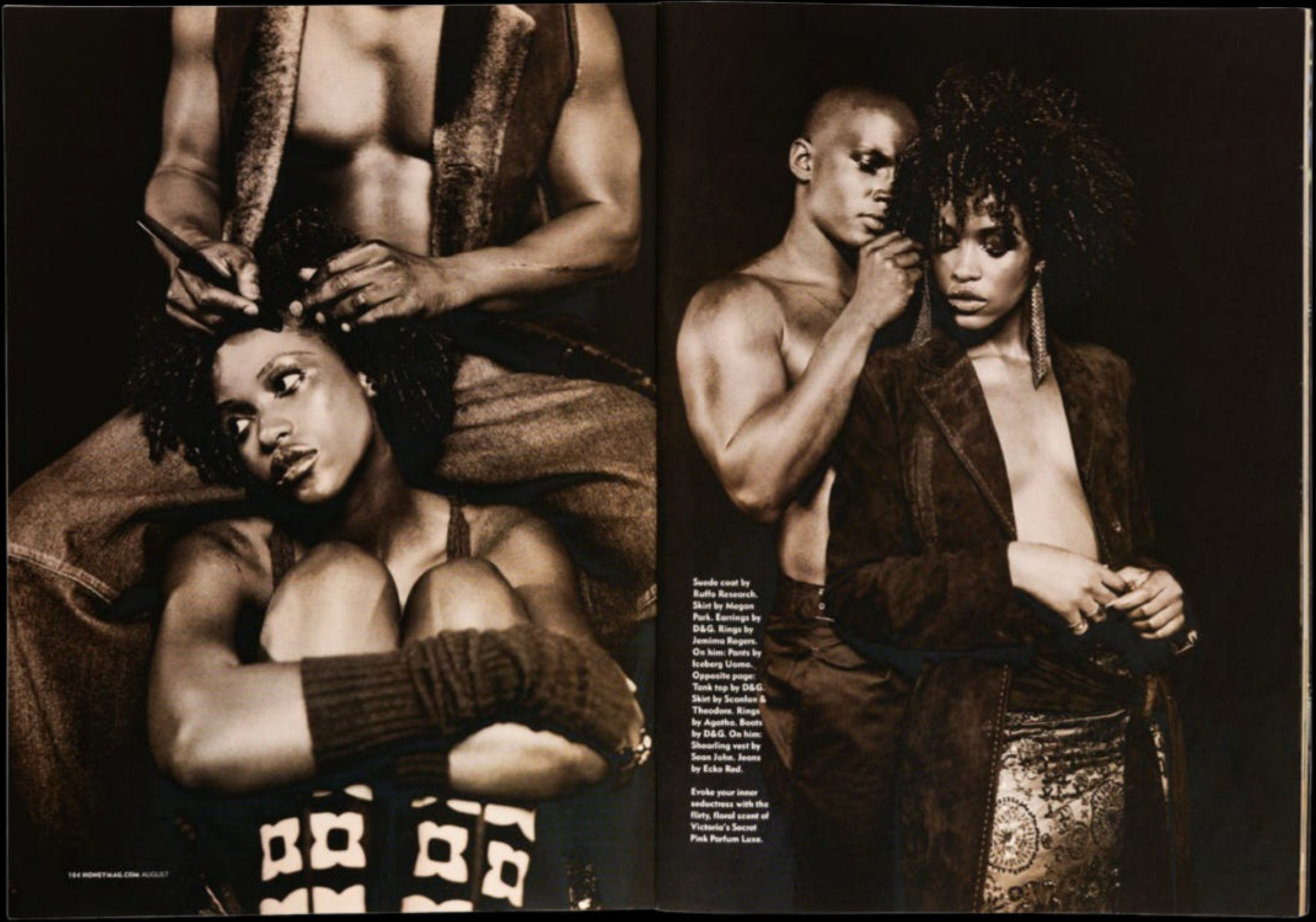
Amy DuBois Barnett

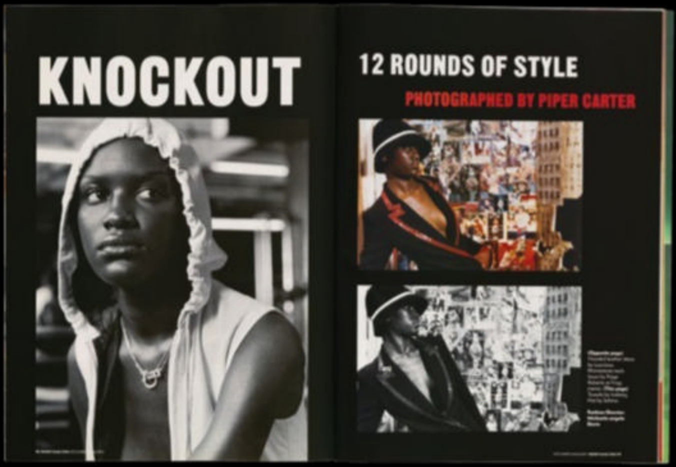
DURING THE 1990S AND EARLY 2000S, HIP-HOP SURGED from the streets of Harlem and the Bronx into a multimillion-dollar international industry. As hip-hop and pop culture became indistinguishable, music executives and artists ran New York's social scene, with everyone from Wall Street bros to fashion-industry brass begging for access to the most exclusive record label parties. Models walked high-fashion runways in dookie chains and do-rags, imitating the culture's true innovators: the first generation of Black women who had grown up with hip-hop.

For years, newsstands had little to offer these women. Though venerable and empowering, *Essence*, the lone title for Black women, couldn't possibly reflect the true diversity of its overly broad target audience. Meanwhile, mainstream women were able to choose between titles like *Cosmopolitan*, *Elle*, *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*. For hip-hop enthusiasts, there was *Vibe*, *XXL*, and *The Source*, among others. But those magazines largely embodied the male-dominated perspective of the urban music universe.

Things changed in 1999, when Kierna Mayo and Joicelyn Dingle founded *Honey*, launching the New York–based magazine with a free preview issue graced by Jonathan Mannion's iconic honeycomb photograph of Lauryn Hill and the words "Taste the Future." After the magazine was purchased by Vanguarde Media in 1999, I left a senior role at *Essence* to become *Honey*'s editor in chief—a dream job. I hired a team of brilliant, ambitious women of color who loved music, cared about social issues, and had fabulous taste. The magazine quickly carved out a space where young Black women could see themselves represented—not as a monolith but as a dynamic demographic with multifaceted aspirations and a collectively dope aesthetic.

What set *Honey* apart wasn't just the stories we told but how we told them. The magazine's design sensibility captured


Suede coat by Ruffo Research. Skirt by Megan Park. Earrings by D&G. Rings by Jemima Rogers. On him: Pants by Iceberg Uomo. Opposite page: Tank top by D&G. Skirt by Scanlan & Theodore. Rings by Agatha. Boots by D&G. On him: Shearling vest by Sean John. Jeans by Ecko Red.
Evoke your inner seductress with the flirty, floral scent of Victoria's Secret Pink Parfum Luxe.


KNOCKOUT
12 ROUNDS OF STYLE
PHOTOGRAPHED BY PIPER CARTER

This page, top: Spread from *Honey*, August 2001, with photographs by Barron Claiborne; bottom: Spread from *Honey*, October 2001, with photographs by Piper Carter

Opposite, top: Spread from *Honey*, December/January 2001, with photograph by Jonathan Mannion; bottom: Spread from *Honey*, March 2002, with photographs by Barron Claiborne
Courtesy the author

the raw, vibrant energy of New York—a hub for hip-hop and fashion. Our photoshoots were cultural events in themselves, visual love letters to a generation. We hired a mix of photographers with art, fashion, and music-industry cred who also understood our audience, such as Vincent Soyez, Lauri Lyons, Estevan Oriol, Udo Spreitzenbarth, Kwaku Alston, and Garth Aikens. Our visuals were steeped in insider cultural allusions: models in roller skates wearing both fascinators and Kangols, taken by Jamel Shabazz; a black-and-white designer photoshoot in a boxing ring, photographed by Piper Carter; a moody image of a shirtless male model combing a female model's thick natural hair, taken by Barron Claiborne; a spread featuring our favorite female DJs, photographed by Renée Cox. The brilliant Marc Baptiste, who was responsible for many of *Honey*'s most memorable spreads, photographed models in looks that referenced Stevie Wonder, Bob Marley, Prince, Jimi Hendrix, and other music icons. *Honey*'s pages spoke to our readers on a deeply personal level.

We extended our smart trendsetting ethos to the artists we covered, featuring hot up-and-comers as well as established stars. Multiple major artists credit *Honey* with their first solo magazine covers—from Alicia Keys to a baby-faced Beyoncé, styled in a dramatic blond Afro and swinging 1960s makeup. Being a hot up-and-comer itself, *Honey*, and everyone on the editorial team, often had to fight for our more famous cover subjects and for our uncommon creative perspective. I don't know what was more difficult, confirming Mary J. Blige for a cover or persuading her to be photographed by Dah Len in a

black leather rocker-chick outfit holding an electric guitar. I don't know if it was more challenging to secure André 3000's cover or get him to pose shirtless in a surreal circus-themed conceptual photoshoot by Baptiste. Booking the Lil' Kim cover was a monthslong undertaking; getting her to pose for Ruven Afanador wearing a custom-made micromini dress made of dollar bills was nearly impossible. But we did. And that's what made *Honey* unique.

In fighting the notion that Black women were a monolith, *Honey* stood alone in representing the diversity of our readers. But what I'm most proud of is how *Honey* empowered its audience to see themselves as cultural innovators. We didn't just tell them they were leaders in style and creativity—we showed them, through every photoshoot, feature, and editorial decision. *Honey* helped galvanize a generation and, in doing so, created a powerful sisterhood that lasted beyond its untimely discontinuation in 2003.

In my last editor's note in *Honey*, I wrote that "as editor of this crazysexycool magazine, I have been able to give a voice to us—young women of color who just didn't see our lives, interests, and style reflected in other magazines." That accomplishment has been one of the greatest honors of my career. "Because of you," I wrote, "I feel I can achieve my wildest dreams—and I want the same for every one of you wonderful *Honey* women. I love you guys and I'm going to miss you tremendously. But I'll be watching!"

Amy DuBois Barnett is the former editor in chief of *Honey*, *Teen People*, and *Ebony* magazines.

There Are New Suns

Ja'Tovia Gary in Conversation with Fatima Jamal

"My films are for audiences who have yet to be born," Ja'Tovia Gary sometimes says. Gary, born in Dallas and now based in Atlanta, makes cinematic poems that interweave archival and contemporary images in an attempt to recast narratives around Black histories and futures. Her breakout work, *The Giverny Document* (2019), alternates footage of the artist walking through Monet's canonical garden with recordings of Nina Simone, the activist Fred Hampton, on-the-street interviews in Harlem, and police brutality, forming a dense, associative tapestry about the safety and bodily autonomy of Black women.

Fatima Jamal also confronts the gaze placed on the Black female body. An Atlanta-born, Brooklyn-based artist whose practice spans filmmaking, writing, activism, and modeling—she's walked runways for labels such as Telfar and Random Identities—Jamal is perhaps best known for *No Fats, No Femmes* (2015–ongoing), a documentary experiment in self-portraiture and a vivisection of the power structures that shape desire. Her work aspires to imagine a world where othered bodies thrive.

The two artists and friends recently met to discuss the roles spirituality and ancestral healing play in their work, the importance of creative courage, and their shifting understandings of home.

Fatima Jamal: **My first encounter with your work was *The Giverny Document*. It blew my mind as a young experimental filmmaker to find someone who was searching for new ways to bend the form.**

Ja’Tovia Gary: In that film, I’m considering the body. If you take my body, or your body, and place it in Monet’s garden, that’s going to bring about a different meaning than if you place us in the middle of Times Square. So how do history and time come to bear on that person? How will that affect, or how will that in some ways counteract or add to, any sort of meaning that can be made when that body is present? Since I’m using archival material so often, I’m not behind the camera filming all the time. I might be using footage of, say, Ruby Dee from the 1960s. What does Ruby Dee represent? What is she saying? What’s going to happen if I place Ruby Dee next to Assata Shakur? I try to represent Blackness with integrity, with courage, but also creative courage, and with a thought toward, how can we honor these folks?

Home is something that we do and make wherever our body goes.

FJ: **Something related to this is consent. For a long time, I’ve only wanted to film myself, because consent gets tricky when you’re making images with people who have changed over time. Even myself. I reckon with how I’ve changed over time and how much I’m willing to allow past images to be put on the table.**

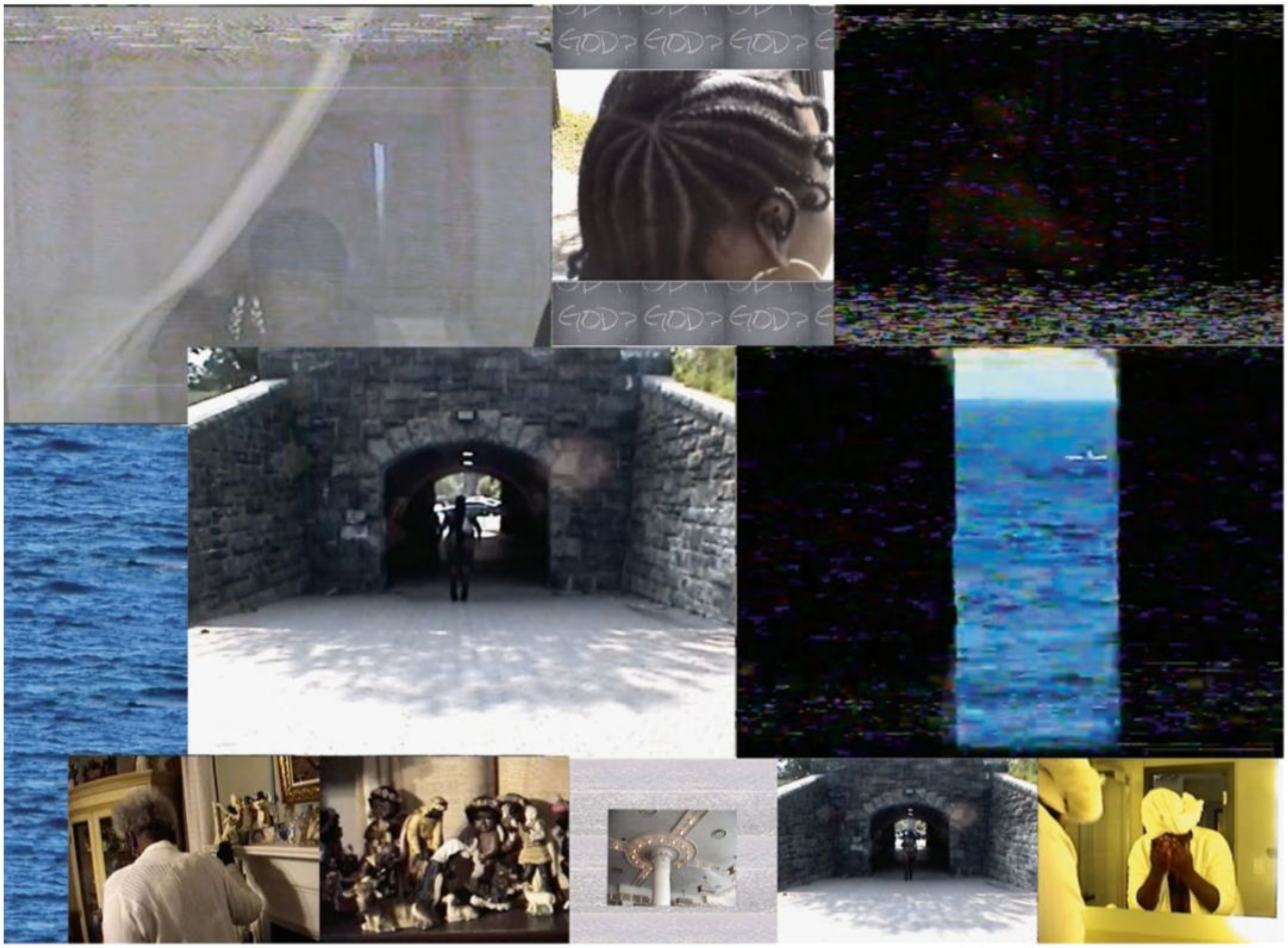
JG: It’s real.

FJ: **I was just thinking about a recent trip to Dakar, and how there are so many people there who resist capture. There was this one guy who was just so beautiful, who didn’t want to be photographed. It’s partly about something spiritual that can’t be seen in pictures. So when I think about representing Black bodies on a transnational level, I’m just like, Wow, there**

Page 104:
Ja’Tovia Gary, *Precious Memories (Tower)*, 2020

This page:
Fatima Jamal, *The Long Memory Quilt*, 2024–ongoing
Courtesy the artist

Opposite, top and bottom:
Ja’Tovia Gary, Stills from *An Ecstatic Experience*, 2015


GOD? GOD? GOD?
GOD? GOD? GOD?

are some of us who can't even be captured in a photograph, and what that means for our lineage, what it means for our eyes being documented permanently by a camera.

JG: That's definitely something to consider when you think about the history of the camera, which was not made for us. It's an anti-Black instrument. I'm making this long-term memoir film that incorporates old footage of myself—I'm talking 2007, early aughts—being an obnoxious American tourist in Ghana, pointing the camera at everyone. Folks are putting their hands up, blocking their faces, and I get this quick lesson in consent, but also privilege. Looking at this footage now makes me question what it means for people who are coming from the West to spaces in the Global South and the desire to explore and lay your gaze upon people, wanting to capture them. Even as a Black American.

FJ: **It's like when people did allow me to film them, it was because they desired me. I felt that I could often exploit their desire for me to keep the camera up, because they're not even worried about the camera as much as they're just worried about me giving them time and attention. It's pretty interesting.**

JG: You often turn the camera on yourself. I'm wondering, why is it important for you to document yourself at this moment?

FJ: **I turn the camera on myself in an effort to make myself real to myself and to see myself. To leave evidence. To craft some manner of aliveness and beauty that registers in my brain and body as a knowing and confidence. That I might believe in myself and think myself worthy and capable of good. That I might have a record of how I lived, how I worked to love myself, and all the things I saw and did in between. To build an archive.**

Growing up, I loved taking pictures. I'd often buy disposable cameras and turn them onto myself to take a selfie (before the iPhone came out). And after being told I was ugly for so long, I needed to see for myself what was possible of my image. On top of that, I loved my family's photo-albums. My grandmother has containers full of them, and she has a select few on view in the living room. When you come to my grandmother's house, it's literally an African American art and historical museum. If I could offer a title to the exhibition that is our living room, I'd title it *Sunday Morning* for all the church-going, Sunday-morning paintings. She has multiple Black renderings of *The Last Supper* and an array of Black and African figurines that I used to have to clean one by one, and put back in place, because she knew where every one of them was. Like bell hooks said, the home was a place that loved her. So when I lived with my grandmother as a teenager, subconsciously my mind was being awakened to Black art aesthetics every day.

JG: That Black American practice of dressing and styling the home place, the domestic space, is so specific. My great-aunt had the same figurines. I also have an auntie in Arkansas, and she's got a bunch of yard art. I'm talking angels, butterflies, frogs, and bottle trees, and chimes, a bunch of ceramic stuff, things hanging from the roof, and positioned on the porch. My mom is usually critical of this aesthetic when we visit. But I'm like, "No, no, no, baby, this is abstract expressionism. You need to get *into* it."

FJ: **When I think back on what makes me an artist, I keep coming back to that. I asked my grandmother recently in a letter, "Have you ever considered yourself an artist?" So much of the art world takes us away from the places where we first learned or encountered art. I learned art in my grandmother's house. And a lot of my arts education is**

due to the Black church. I learned and developed my talent and artistic sensibility there in theater, worship arts, singing, dance, graphic design, and oration.

JG: I love that you're thinking about these elders as artists. My great-aunt Mae walked around with a Super 8 camera in the 1960s. This is the same auntie that's responsible for me having six or seven reels of Super 8 footage where I can see people who have passed on. She used to clean white folks' houses. She said, "They could do it. Why couldn't I do it? I know who they are. I'm cleaning their house. I know everything about them. So, of course, I can go out here and get me a camera, too, and record my folks."

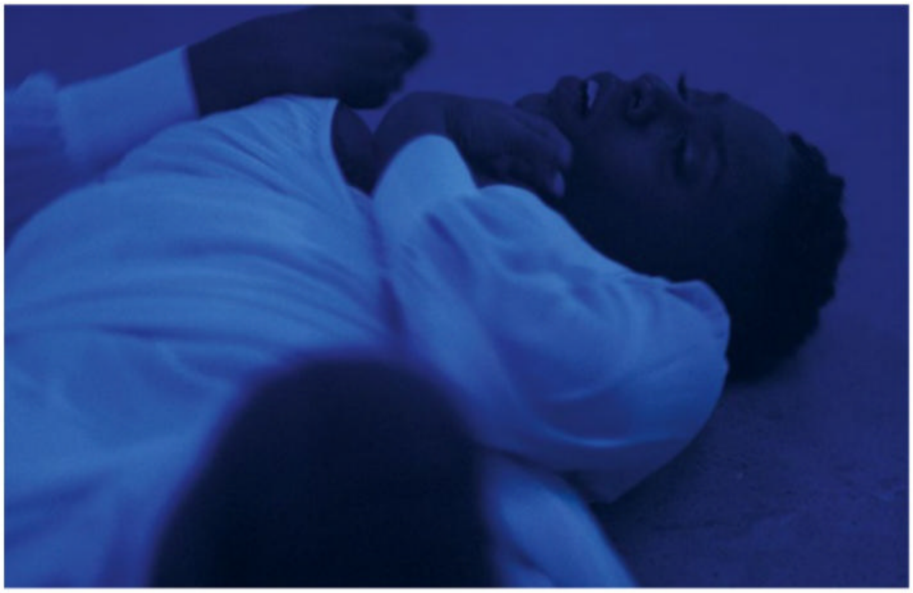
FJ: **When you think about what has been passed down to you from your family, these ancestral understandings of style, of space, of installation, how does that extend to your work?**

JG: I'm trying to put forth a grammar, a fingerprint, something that is specific to me, but that resonates with the collective. I'm thinking about rappers and jazz musicians. Thelonious Monk doesn't sound like Oscar Peterson. McCoy Tyner doesn't sound like Miles Davis. Just as GloRilla doesn't sound like Meg or Doechii. Everybody has their style. But too often, this notion of style sometimes gets lost, especially if you are somebody who's trying to come up in the ranks. You might feel like you to have to conform or create something familiar and safe.

I've made a lot of mistakes in the process of making my films. I always tell the young people, "Don't worry about those mistakes; oftentimes these are little portals, these are little thresholds for you to push forward toward something new." This is not to say that everything has to be completely original. There's nothing new under the sun. But Octavia Butler says there are new suns.

FJ: **Hearing you talk, I thought about one of my favorite DJs, who's also a record producer, Theo Parrish. He says that we should all work to identify our sound signature, which is the title of his label. Brilliant philosophy and approach to making music. I want to develop my own sound signature, and I am learning how to**

Ja'Tovia Gary, Still from *An Ecstatic Experience*, 2015



craft that. But you can only learn that through improvisation. You have to play.

JG: There's such an extreme archival aesthetic right now. And I say *archival aesthetic* and not an *archival practice* because I feel there is a distinction. So we have to be very careful about just randomly pulling clips because we think that they're cool and cute, and removing context. But visually, because the formula is so insisted upon, folks will fall in line with that formula. And then, if somebody diverges and does something new, you'll see a bunch of repeats. I don't want to say copycats, but you'll see a bunch of folks that are interested in exploring that aesthetic as well, without having any real connection to it perhaps. But it is something to strive for, your own unique sound signature.

FJ: **People can hop on aesthetic value, but they don't know the madness that one undergoes within to birth such a thing.**

JG: My God.

FJ: **They want the final aesthetic. They don't want the initiation though.**

JG: My God today!

FJ: **That's why I think people can be protective over the things that they give birth to.**

JG: Right. That's so important. Because you're not getting to a new song without a little bit of tribulation. You're going to have to travail a bit. You got to go through that valley in order to come out on the other side.

FJ: **Earlier, you mentioned wanting to construct a grammar. Doing language, as Toni Morrison says. Talk to me about *Quiet as It's Kept* (2023).**

JG: *Quiet as It's Kept* is a short experimental film–cinematic poem, and a companion piece to *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison's first novel. I'm using the text as a point of departure to create a loose interpretation, or reply, not an adaptation of the book. I'm taking contemporary icons, imagery, events, and I'm exploring some of the themes that come up in the book. Chief among them would be the gaze.

This idea of perception, how we perceive ourselves, how we are perceived by others, and how this has an influence and an impact on our mental health, our wellness. *The Bluest Eye* includes a lot about cinema and the movies.

I've taken the algorithm, I've taken the TikTok feed, I've taken viral videos from Instagram, because I feel that's a contemporary manifestation of the gaze. That's how we are formulating our sense of self. It's how value and judgment on what is considered beautiful and desirable is passed. Also, whose life is worthy —who gets to live and who dies at the end of the day. So you see a lot of contemporary social-media footage, but you also see archival from Old Hollywood. You see Super 8mm film that I have shot of myself. So I am gazing at myself, and engaging with marigolds, which are a totem in the text. You see me in Senegal. You see a very important interview with an elder of mine, Dr. Kokahvah Selassie, a Toni Morrison scholar who has written about how traditional African religious practices show up in Morrison's books.

FJ: **Many people think only about the adaptation, but they don't think much about the reply. I don't want to know what you think, I want to know what you feel. Toni Morrison makes you feel some horrific things.**

JG: She makes us feel these things because she understands that in order to move through these things, we have to feel them.

FJ: **Right. Because from a very African cosmological perspective, we're not thinking from the brain. We're thinking from the gut. The film was such a great response to that.**

JG: Thank you.

FJ: **The waters.**

JG: The water. There's a lot of water in there.

FJ: **Speaking of waters, indigo is currently bleeding on my hands. That's how you know it's real.**

JG: There's nothing like an indigo-stained hand. There's nothing quite like it. It feels auspicious, like holding a handful of black-eyed peas.

This page:
Fatima Jamal modeling a look from Random Identities' fall 2020 season in Florence.
Photograph by Texas Isaiah

Opposite, top:
Ja'Tovia Gary, Still from *The Giverny Document*, 2019

Opposite, middle and bottom: Ja'Tovia Gary, Stills from *Quiet as It's Kept*, 2023

FJ: **It reminds me that home is a very active thing. It's not passive. It is something that we do and make wherever our body goes. Because I started grieving as I was leaving Dakar for Saly, and again leaving Saly to return to America. I felt like I was leaving home for a place that is home but not so much my home, as I feel so estranged. I left thinking of the words of an elder from Gorée Island. When asked, "What can we in the West do to stay connected to our ancestry?" he said to learn an African language. What does learning different languages open up for our understanding of home and belonging?**

JG: It opens up new pathways and possibilities of connection in the brain and in

Gioncarlo Valentine,
Fatima in London, 2019
© the artist

I'm trying to put forth a grammar, a fingerprint.

the collective. There's something about landing in a space where things feel both familiar and new at the same time, where these are complete and total strangers, but you're looking at doppelgängers and members of your family. You're saying, "Oh, that looks like my uncle right there; oh, this is my father's smile; this was Bahia; this was Accra." There's something very beautiful about reconnecting. I'm glad you got to experience Dakar, because, baby, she's gorgeous.

FJ: **I think a kind of baptism happens when we cross the Atlantic to return to the place of capture, where we were stolen from. It's just like asking, What would we be if we were never stolen from this place? And then to come to Gorée Island and see how many slave houses there were in addition to Maison des esclaves (where the Door of No Return is) blew my mind; and also that the island had a people before and after the capture. There are people who still live on the island, and they have a culture and a way of being and a way of relating to one another. Home is such a troubled notion. When I think about it in relationship to the body, it feels a little bit closer to belonging.**

JG: And the body, give or take, is something that we can control. As someone who has survived sexual violence, for a very long time it was very hard for me to be in my body. In fact, sometimes it still is. It can be terrifying to be in your body. But when you engage in things like, say, a somatic practice, or prayer and meditation—and I've been doing Qigong, which an elder introduced me to—this kind of energetic work helps you come back into the body. There's something very powerful about that—reclaiming this first space, this initial home, like returning to where you were stolen from.

FJ: **When I first had the idea for *No Fats, No Femmes* ten years ago, I thought about Marlon Riggs's *Tongues Untied* (1989) as a model. Since there was a limited grammar available to me, so much of the early part of the project was through that subjective lens where I was taking up Black gay men's sociality and history. All through a Black feminist gaze, of course, but it has since expanded far beyond that.**

I've recently taken up the practice of letter writing. I wrote to my mom and my grandmother last year, and one of the things that I talked to them both at length about was how I can only imagine what it has been like navigating the world as they are—because we are spitting images of each other. I come from fat, dark-skinned women. There was a moment where I was filming my grandmother, and she uttered the word *ugly*. So the psychic pain that I had been feeling is not imagined. This is a real thing. I felt them. I'm praying for the bloodline. Because I'm like, If this is what I'm navigating, walking through the world as a six-foot dark-skinned Black woman, I know they got hell. There is just nothing but grace and abounding love for

Ja'Tovia Gary, *You Smell Like Outside . . .*, 2023
All works by Ja'Tovia Gary courtesy the artist and Frank Elbaz, Paris

them. Because it's not an easy thing. This film is a portrait of a woman. It's a self-portrait of a woman who is reckoning with some very serious things in creating an image of herself. My body has gone so many places they wish that they could have gone, and when I consider all of that, it's a self-portrait, but it also feels like a very generative and venerative work, where I'm lifting up these people that reared me to a certain place where I could rear myself.

JG: I'm so strengthened to hear you clearly identify the creative work as work of ancestral healing. How this creative project is connecting you to the lived experiences of your mother, your grandmother. When folks talk about being an artist, this is what matters. Moving beyond an object and really thinking about your art as an archive of who you are. This is the real-deal work. When people talk about "doing the work," this is what I think about.

Ja'Tovia Gary is an artist and filmmaker based in New Orleans.

Fatima Jamal is a writer, model, and artist based in Harlem.

Devin Allen
Picture Man

Rikki Byrd

In a photograph taken by Devin Allen, a woman stands against a brick wall, light bouncing off her darkened puffer coat. With the subject's gaze averted from the camera, the image reads as Johannes Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (1665) reimagined. The covered head of the sitter in the painting is swapped for Bantu knots. The luminescent bauble of Vermeer's painting is replaced by a large disk stating "BLACK LIVES MATTER" beside a raised fist. "Apparel is a part of that whole activation," Allen said of his observations of style within the protests he has documented. "'I'm going to wear my pain, in a sense. I'm going to wear what I stand for.'"

In addition to his decade-long commitment to photographing social justice movements, this image also demonstrates Allen's deeper engagement with portraiture. In 2017, he spoke with the critic Jessica Lynne for this publication and noted his interest in exploring the genre further, naming the work of Anthony Barboza, Jamel Shabazz, and Ruddy Roye as a kind of self-guided syllabus for expanding his practice. The list now includes other photographers such as Ming Smith and the painter Amy Sherald, whose work, Allen said, prompted him to begin photographing Black women from a vantage point that causes the viewer to look up at them, exemplifying their strength. This approach is evident in his image of two women wearing Afros and large hoop earrings at the 2019 Afropunk festival in Brooklyn: The photographer casts them against a cloudy sky, so that they look down like a pair of angels.

This photograph is an example of not only Allen's study over the years but also his ever-expanding subject matter since his rise to prominence. In 2015, his photograph of a Black Lives Matter protest organized in the wake of the murder of Freddie Gray appeared on the cover of *Time*. Since then, he has added another *Time* cover, a fellowship from the Gordon Parks Foundation, a nomination for an NAACP Image Award, and published three books. Among all this, he remains focused on documenting Black life and his beloved hometown of Baltimore—not just protests but also the mundane.

"It took me a while to understand what I wanted to say in the work," Allen said. "I had to be the visual eyes for my community because we had been demonized, definitely, coming out of Freddie Gray's murder. I wanted to show the humility and the love and the admiration and pride that people don't know that we have here. That's when I decided that I was going to document everyday life in Baltimore."

Allen notes that it was the tattoo artists, rappers, hairstylists, and nail technicians in his community that he first recognized as artists. This acknowledgment is tantamount to the aesthetics he draws attention to in his portraits: swooped baby hairs, door-knocker earrings, gold necklaces, and the woman sitting stately atop a horse adorned in sneakers, cut-off denim shorts, and fishnet tights. In one image, Allen zooms in on a subject's overlapped hands in fingerless gloves reminiscent of a Spiderman costume. Instead of webbing being emitted from the fingers, stiletto nails emerge, emblazoned with jewels and a declaration of place and ego: "West Baltimore" written on the thumbs, "Top Bitch" on other fingers.

Allen himself hails from the area scripted across these nails, and he, too, proclaims its specificity. The camera turned him into a sort of flaneur of Baltimore, pushing him into neighborhoods outside of West Baltimore that were unfamiliar to him growing up. Apprehensive glances toward the man with the camera who was not from around here eventually turned into admiration, garnering him the title "Picture Man." This meandering was a lesson in building trust as well as an instantiation of his use of the city's exteriors as his primary setting. Allen explained, "People will be like, 'Oh, can I come do a studio visit?' And I'm just like, 'The street's my studio. Catch me outside.'"

In a self-portrait, also staged outdoors, Allen does not take the moment for himself. Instead he trains his lens toward a mirror being held up by a person hardly in the image. He kneels in the lower left corner, his community of peers taking up most of the frame. With his hair styled into an Afro, a barely there pick jutting from it à la a Black Power figure, the picture reflects Allen's foremost backdrop: his people.

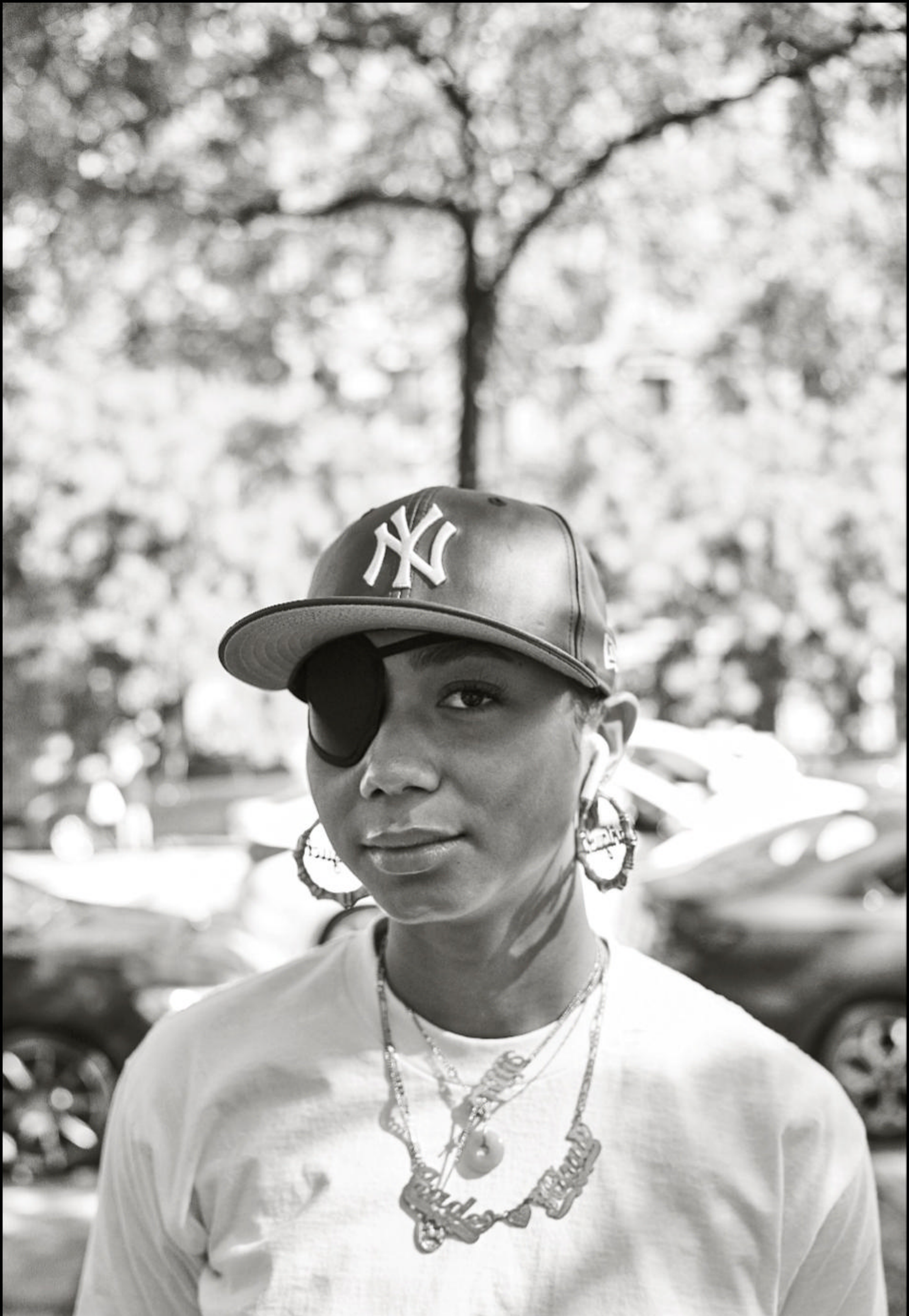
Rikki Byrd is a writer, educator, and curator working at the intersection of fashion, performance, and visual art.

Unless otherwise noted, all photographs *Untitled*, 2019–22

Best
Baltimore
Top
Bitch

BLACK LIVES MATTER

DER ARDU
DER ARDU
DER ARDVE
DER ARDVR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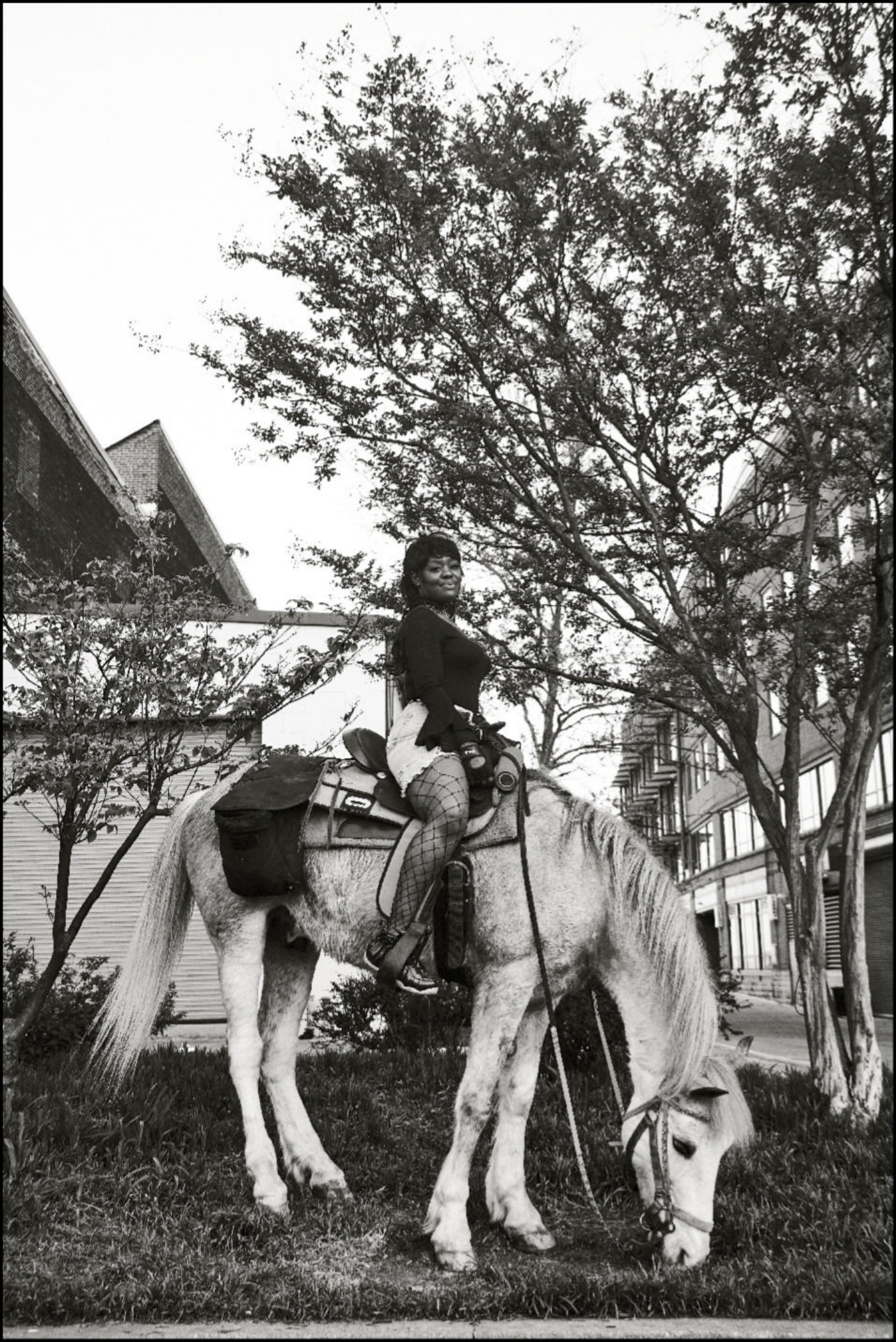
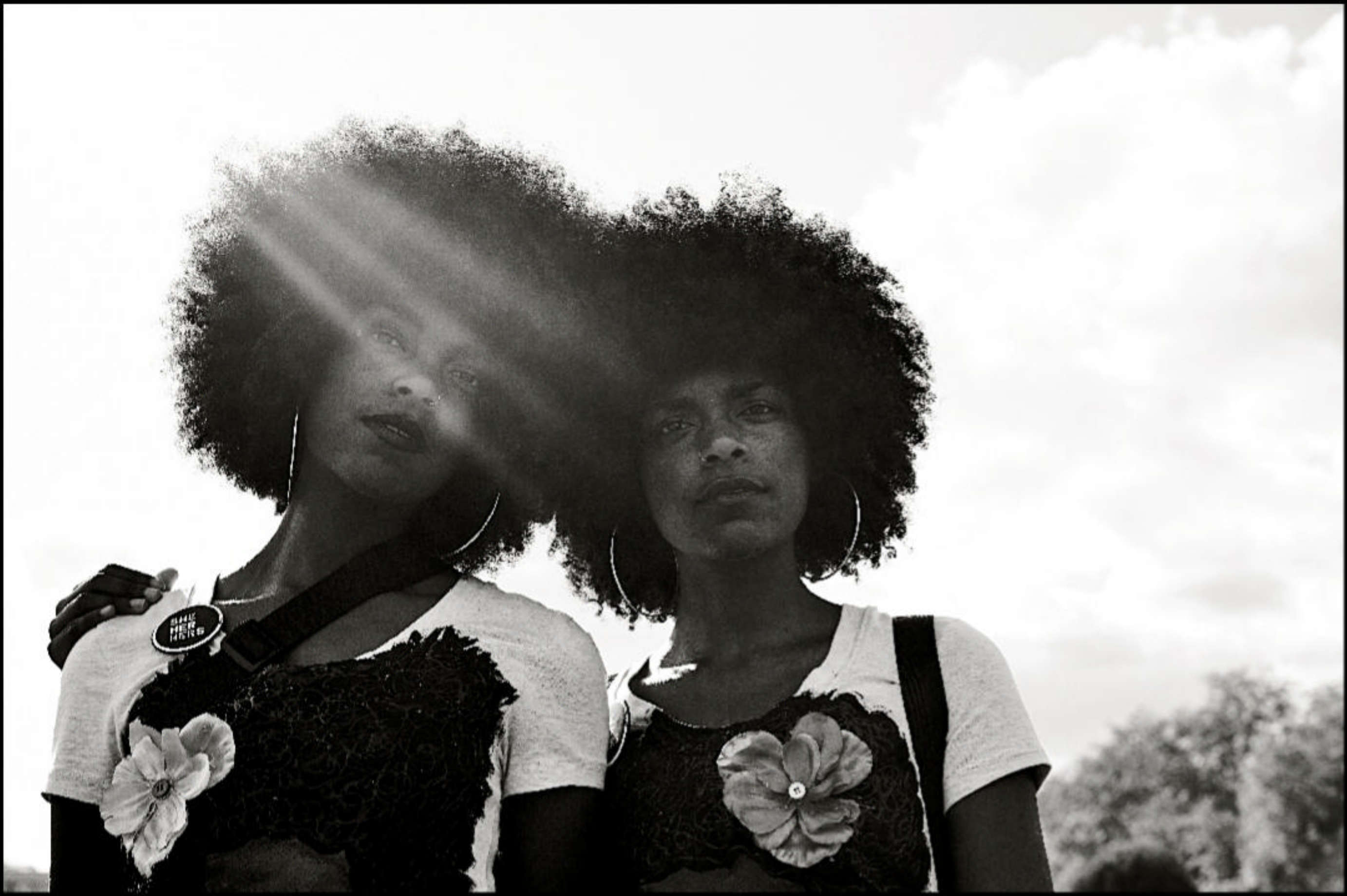
***Around Da Way Cowgirl*, 2023**
All photographs courtesy the artist




SHE
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Manfrotto

Yashua Simmons
Proof of Life

A Conversation with Darnell L. Moore

As a stylist, editor, and éminence grise, Yashua Simmons is an influential force in the worlds of fashion and photography. Whether he's creating looks for celebrities such as Travis Scott, Laverne Cox, and Lana Del Rey or paying homage to his own father as he rides through Yonkers on horseback, Simmons approaches his shoots with a novelist's flair for scene, working with a close-knit network of photographers to craft moments of beauty that often tell stories the fashion industry has long ignored or dismissed.

"My process in making pictures isn't only about clothes," said Simmons, whose work has graced the covers of magazines including *Vanity Fair*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Vogue* and the pages of many more. "It's really about the 360—the who, what, where, when, why. If I'm dressing someone, even if it's a still portrait, just the idea of, Where is this character going? Where are they coming from? If they have this on, what's the story around this portrait?"

Here, Simmons talks with the author and activist Darnell L. Moore about navigating the pressures of legacy media, how he found his point of view, and photography's life-affirming qualities.

Darnell Moore: **Let's start with your backstory. Where do you come from? Who are your people? How did you come to work in fashion, editorial, and styling?**

Yashua Simmons: I always had a love for images, without the context of work. I was always drawn to seeing people who looked like me editorialized in a fantasy way. That's, sort of, the beginning of it all.

DM: **And you're from Yonkers?**

YS: I'm from Yonkers, New York, born and raised, and I did my undergraduate studies at Howard University. It was at Howard where I really found myself. Two years into school, I had no idea what a career looked like. I had studied architecture by the push of my father for a very long time, three years at a special high school, and I studied it two years at Howard. But it wasn't really my calling. Then I connected the dots between fashion and picture making, and that being something I enjoy and love.

DM: **When is this?**

YS: This is 2004. My main consumption of pictures was *Vibe* magazine, and billboards in Times Square, and just snapshots that really brought me to that place.

DM: **You've said that Vibe was one of the spaces that inspired you. You found yourself in those pages. Are there cover stories or pictures inside the magazine that inspire you to this day?**

YS: There're a couple of images that took my breath away. I've looked and looked for them and can't find them. I don't even know if they're real or if I made it up in my imagination. But there's a friend—a stylist, editor, a fantastic person—named Memsor Kamarake who did a story where there was a group of around-the-way girls. They're in this picture, and they're under the Brooklyn Bridge, and shot in the evening, and they're in these silk chiffon dresses, like John Galliano, Dior, and they look like me and you and the people that I know and I grew up with—and they just look stunning and beautiful under the bridge. It's a picture that stuck out in my mind. It was sort of like, How do these people get to wear these things? We don't have access to that. That's not what we wear. Why are they wearing this? Why are they in this beautiful setting? Why are they in a fantasy set that is not ours?

DM: **I imagine that *Vibe* might have been a place where, finally, the people who seemed to be absent in those pages are now present. I don't want to use the word *resistance*. I want to say that this, for you, is a place where you finally got to see the people who had been erased in some ways.**

YS: Maybe. But that's not how I experienced it. I experienced it as truth, and I experienced it as our truth. I always found myself dreaming in those pages. I wasn't looking at other magazines. I

Page 124:
Yashua Simmons, Los Angeles, 2025
Photograph by Paul Mpagi Sepuya for *Aperture*

This page:
Dana Lixenberg, *Untitled*, for *Vibe*, 1994. Styled by Andrew Dosunmu
Courtesy the artist and GRIMM, Amsterdam

Opposite:
Micaiah Carter for *Out*, 2019
Courtesy the artist

don't have the story of, Oh, I was in fashion because I loved *Vogue*. I didn't know what *Vogue* was.

DM: **You don't like your work being described as activist. You say you're more interested in creating beautiful, singular artistic work that has a point of view, work that you love. Is that a fair assessment of how you go about image making?**

YS: I think that's fair. My first job, or my first real stake in fashion, I was interning at *Elle* magazine. This is not a Black space. A lot of the information that I received there—and I was there for ten years—was counter to what my instinct was. I got there as an intern, and later on, when I started making my own pages and styling my own work for the magazine, a lot of the critique of my work was that it was not *Elle*. Right? A lot of my work was edited, because for me, the reference in my head was something other than what they had going on. So the information that I was receiving in terms of the quality of my work was based off of a lot of non-Black people having opinions about what it was that I was doing.

DM: **Your first magazine job, then, is at *Elle* as an editor?**

YS: As an intern with the then creative director Joe Zee, who was a master. He was doing editorial pages and also touching talent like Justin Timberlake and Jennifer Lopez. For me, he was kind of like the first über-editor, the person who was doing it all. I wanted his job. He was the creative director at probably one of the top three American books, and he was also working in pop culture and doing projects, working with talent outside the magazine space. He had this niche position within fashion that was very attractive to me. So I was interning there, and when I left, that's a ten-year span. It was the bread of my training, my absorption of sensibility. It's where I came into my own and developed my point of view as it pertains to fashion and styling.

DM: **And then what after that?**

YS: After that, I took a bigger role within Hearst, styling across many different publications in their portfolio: *Esquire*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Town & Country*, *Elle*. At this point, the digital presence of fashion was getting big.

Clifford Prince King, Kelvin Harrison Jr., for *Fantastic Man*, 2022
Courtesy the artist

> I was always drawn to seeing people who looked like me editorialized in a fantasy way.

It took me leaving to really find myself and what it is that I wanted to say. In a corporate environment, a lot of the messaging and a lot of the point of view is not necessarily yours.

DM: **I'm going to jump a bit. I often go to this quote when I'm thinking about photography. Susan Sontag wrote in a 1963 novel of hers called *The Benefactor* that "Life is a movie. Death is a photograph." I always disagreed with that. I think about *Vibe*. I think about the work of Gordon Parks or Carrie Mae Weems, or younger folk like Clifford Prince King, Shaniqwa Jarvis, Kennedi Carter, Jamel Shabazz, Texas Isaiah, Tyler Mitchell. We can go on and on. Black people have a very particular relationship, I think, to photographs because that's where our lives are captured, particularly lives that have been in some ways erased. So in that way, photography is not where we go to die but where our lives are brought to bear.**

YS: Well, speaking to "Life is a movie. Death is a photograph," what I realized in the magazine space, specifically, is that images over time become more important. They may be important today, but they are more important over time. They're snapshots. They're time capsules. They're proof of life. They're archival. I might like a magazine today, but I know in twenty years that magazine, that issue, is going to be much more important than it is today. I get most joy now when I'm looking at an old issue of something.

DM: **Are there people, photographers in particular, who have inspired you?**

YS: You named quite a group of them that have done that. Tyler and Clifford and Shaniqwa are making beautiful pictures now, but I think in twenty years those pictures are going to represent a time and space that—who knows what it will be? They all do singular work, and they capture Black life that is very different from a Jamel Shabazz capture or a Gordon Parks capture. They're capturing today, and that is their work, that's their passion. Those images will be important in telling the times that we live in now.

DM: **After leaving Hearst, you went to *Out*. Unlike Hearst, which is a parent company of several magazines, *Out* is very specifically focused on LGBTQ life. I imagine that afforded you more space to possibly dream new stories, to tell new stories. But what was the decision behind that move?**

YS: Phillip Picardi, wonder kid in media, leaves Condé Nast in 2018 to become editor in chief of *Out*, a legacy brand, which at that point had focused primarily on white gay men. So he's taking over this brand to sort of build new life, to take the magazine in a more modern, all-inclusive queer direction. He DMs me one day: "Hey, I'm going to *Out*. I'd like you to come and be my fashion director. I love your work. What do you say?" I said yes without thinking about it. And not because it was *Out* and not because of really anything other than growth. It was a selfish reason. There was more money, and it was a higher title. But it really was my foray into people working with the idea of a political agenda, or with politics on the line, and working in what we would call an activist space. I didn't come from that space. But I was like, Shit, yeah—all this needs to happen. This idea of a time capsule for queer people needs to also be taught, and this all needs to go down on the books. This needs to be written.

DM: **You mentioned some fashion houses and photographers. There are a few stories I want to list that made me so enamored of your approach. Like when I saw the images of the Alvin Ailey dancers who were dressed in Louis Vuitton, or the story of the ballroom icon Jazell Barbie [Royale], or your shoot with Laverne Cox. And then you and Micaiah Carter did a shoot with Marilyn Minter. I saw the photographs, but I also saw so much of what I understood to be your fingerprint on those works, beyond just the photographer capturing the image. Help us understand how those are made.**

Lelanie Foster, *Yonkers, New York*, for *Essence*, 2023
Courtesy the artist

Images may be important today, but they are more important over time.

YS: Well, it wasn't rocket science. It was very simple and very easy for us to sit and be like, "We want to highlight these people, we want to make them feel beautiful." Marilyn Minter, for example, is an activist in her own right. She's an ally. We called her, and we were like, "Hey, we're working on this art issue. Will you come make these pictures with us? We want to shoot a lesbian on the cover. We have a beautiful model, Ruth Bell, and we want to shoot with Bell on the cover." She was like, "Yeah, let's do it."

DM: **Can you think of one or two times where there was a perfect collaboration?**

YS: As you mentioned before, my process in making pictures isn't only about clothes. It's really about the 360—the who, what, where, when, why. If I'm dressing someone, even if it's a still portrait, just the idea of, Where is this character going? Where are they coming from? If they have this on, what's the story around this portrait?

I've often collaborated with Emmanuel Monsalve, who's an amazing photographer. We've worked very closely in that way. One of my favorite shoots that I've done to date appears in *Cultured* magazine. We worked together to highlight the folks of East LA. We worked hand in hand on that storytelling, from clothing to location to pictures to hair to makeup.

DM: **I want to go to this *Essence* magazine series you did with the photographer Lelanie Foster, which was another collaboration. You partnered with her to make photographs of your father, who you styled on horseback, with his horse, in your hometown, on the streets of Yonkers. I would call it a dream project, right? A project of legacy for you. They were some of the most beautiful images that I know you created.**

YS: One of my style inspirations has always been my dad, and the way that he lives his life. He's kind of this renaissance man. He's a salsa dancer. He's a business owner. He's an entrepreneur. He's a philanthropist. He's a cowboy. And we don't live in the countryside. We lived in Yonkers. He could have on, I don't know, Timberlands with a North Face and a cowboy hat, and be in a pickup truck, with jeans on. I always thought that was very interesting from a style perspective. I wanted to honor my dad that way, and also to create what may not be "normal" pictures that we're seeing of ourselves.

ENDI

This page and opposite:
Emmanuel Monsalve
for *Out*, 2020, and for
***Cultured*, 2023**
Courtesy the artist

DM: **You styled Aretha Franklin, Cicely Tyson, these two icons.**

YS: I styled Aretha. I assisted Samira [Nasr], and she styled Cicely Tyson.

DM: **Who are now these venerated ancestors. When I think about what you said about the importance of photographs for Black people, particularly in terms of archival pictures, do you look at those photographs today and just go, Wow, I can't believe I was part of that? What's your response when seeing them?**

YS: As a practice, I don't really revisit work that I've done. I just kind of let it live and be out there in the world.

DM: **You've shared so many ways that the projects you've been a part of, even when you weren't aware of it, were pushing back against erasure. Do you still not see it as resistance work?**

YS: No. I don't see it as resistance work. I see it as work that I want to do, as something that feels authentic and honest for me. I think if I start thinking about it in terms of resistance work, it would take the joy out of it. I hate that as Black people—all people, Brown people, marginalized people—our existence has to be set up in the idea that it has to be political or fighting against something. That every time a picture is taken of a Black person or Black family or Black experience, it falls into a political category. Oh, Black people are in the swimming pool. Oh, that's a phenomenon. It's really like, I just wanted to go for a swim. I'm Black, so I have a political job? No. I just want to make pictures.

Darnell L. Moore is a writer based in Los Angeles, and the author of the memoir *No Ashes in the Fire* (2018).

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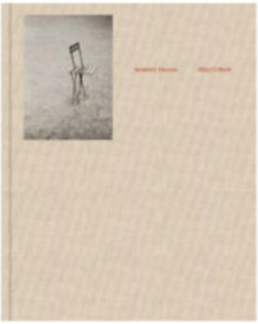

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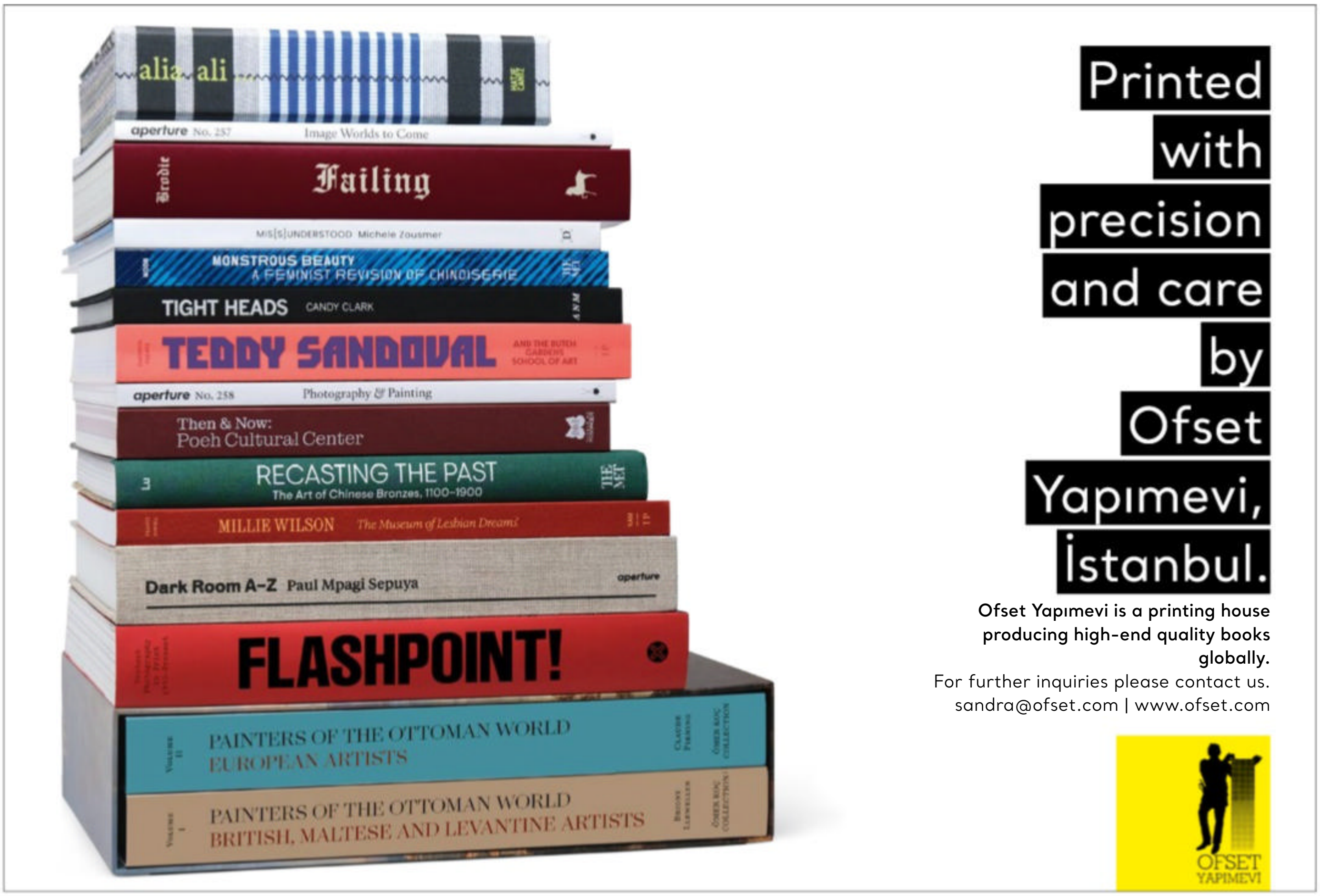

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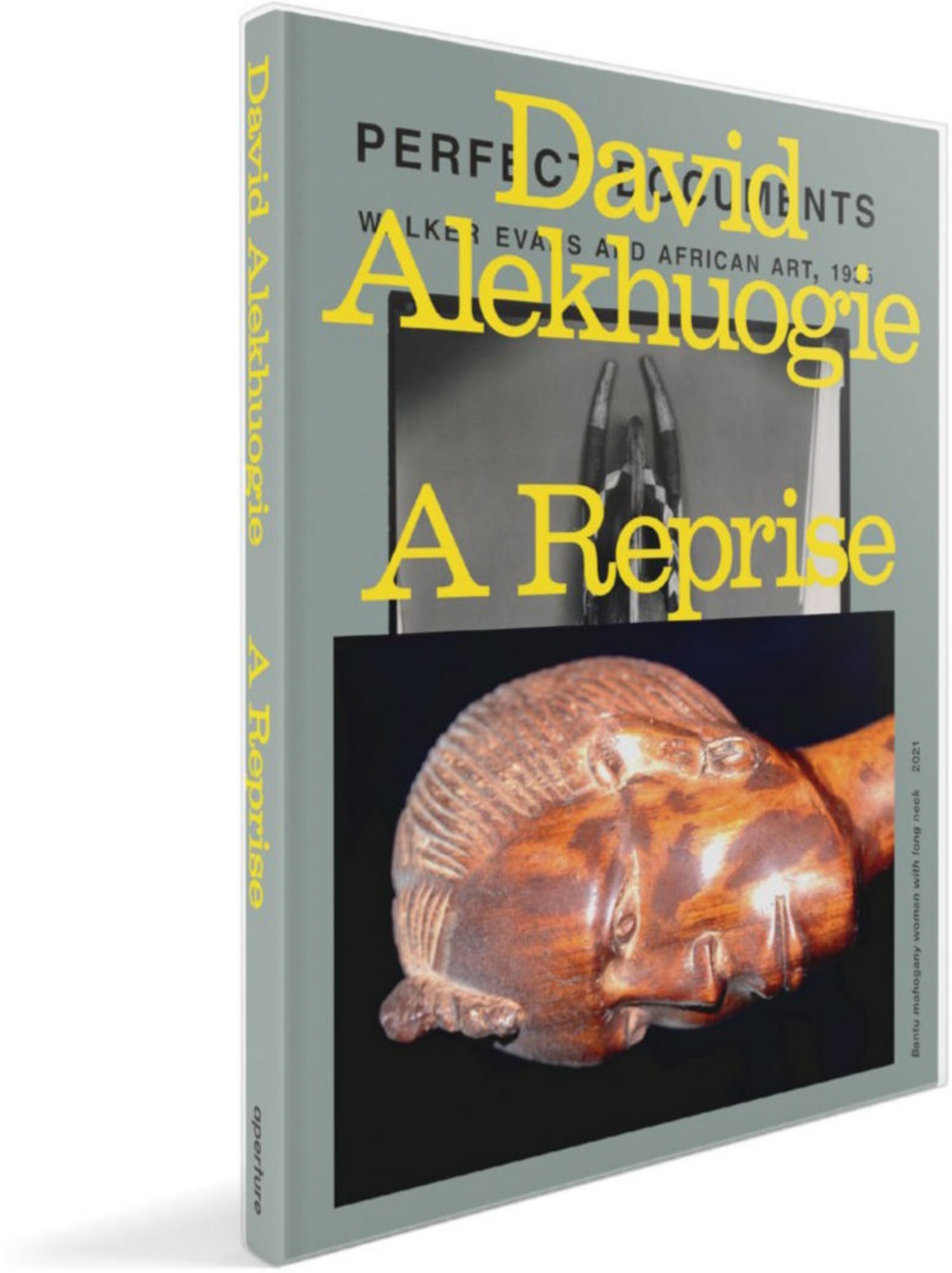
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Spread from Thomas Locke Hobbs, *Rampitas* (2024)

The Eriskay Connection

A Conversation with Aaron Schuman

The Eriskay Connection, a Dutch publishing house run by Rob van Hoesel and Carel Fransen, covers the waterfront. In their hands, labyrinths of research—whether into the history of hallucinogenic fungi, China's one-child policy, domestic architecture in Los Angeles, or the ruins of a fusion reactor on a forsaken island in Patagonia—are transformed into stories told on both intimate and epic scales. Here, the photographer Aaron Schuman talks to the duo about their design philosophies, their process, and the challenges facing the industry today.

Aaron Schuman: **How did you get into graphic design and publishing?**

Rob van Hoesel: I was always drawing as a kid, and as a teenager, I was really into skateboarding and graffiti. I struggled with finding my path through education but eventually studied at the art academy St. Joost, in Breda. That's where graphic design became an obvious choice for me. I felt very comfortable in it, and I also felt I was good at it.

While studying, I did an internship and then started working at Kummer & Herrman, in Utrecht, a well-known Dutch design studio. In 2006, I started my own design business, first making identities, posters, and so on. But by then, everything was becoming digital, and I didn't like making websites and Facebook headers. I wanted to be in print, to smell the ink. In 2010, the idea for the Eriskay Connection came to me. We published our first book in 2011, two years after Carel joined my studio.

Carel Fransen: I also drew a lot as a kid, mostly cars and maps. I actually tried to become a car designer, but that didn't work out. I was more interested in books, maps, and atlases. I went to art school in Breda, too, and met Rob. I told him that I was interested in publishing, and he invited me to join him for one day a week. After graduating, I joined his studio full-time.

AS: **Where did the name, the Eriskay Connection, come from?**

RVH: When I was searching for a name, I was reminded of Eriskay, a small Scottish island in the Outer Hebrides that I visited with my girlfriend on our first backpacking trip. We were just traveling around, and, somehow, we ended up on Eriskay. We went to see the dolphins, but it was misty, so we didn't see anything except rainy fields. Anyway, it was nice to think of this small island being connected to the big world by these random traveling steps. This is what we do in publishing as well; we connect a small island—the author or the story—with the wider world, and vice versa.

AS: **You describe the Eriskay Connection as an intersection between photography, research, and writing, and many of your books incorporate lots of other materials beyond photographs.**

RVH: Yes. Although all of our books include photographs, I don't think that we're necessarily a photobook publisher.

> Sometimes design is about recognizing good ideas that work and then implementing them.

AS: **How would you explain the difference between a photobook and a book that primarily utilizes photography?**

RVH: For us, it's always important that the book is a meaningful object, that it has something to say, reflect upon, explain, or educate about. Often our projects include many layers—archives, maps, texts, photographs—but we're primarily focused on the subject and the story the author wants to tell.

AS: **What's an example of a multilayered book you've published recently?**

CF: Daniel Chatard's *Niemandsland* (2024) is about opencast mining in Germany. He worked on it for seven years, returning to the same community several times with book dummies in which he'd pasted his photographs, and invited people to write on them, to react to the photographs and to what other people wrote. Also, the book covers a twenty-five-year period and is chronological, so in the beginning there's a lot of archival material, because Daniel hadn't started photographing yet. Then, in 2016, his photographs begin to enter the story, along with newspaper clippings, letters he wrote, and so on. It's quite a dense and multilayered book.

Spread from Crystal Bennes, *Klara and the Bomb* (2022)

AS: **It's very easy for photographs to serve more as illustrations rather than independent statements or expressions when placed with so much other material. Is that something you try to avoid or embrace?**

RVH: There's not necessarily anything wrong with photographs being illustrative. It varies in each project and for every author. Some use photographic elements in an illustrative way, some express themselves much more artistically and freely through photographing. Whatever the case, as designers it's our job to understand both the essence of the story and the expression of the artist, and to find the form that suits all of it.

AS: **If someone has invested seven years in a project and then drops it in your lap, that's a big responsibility. There could be tension there in terms of who controls the form.**

RVH: Actually, when someone spends seven years on something, they often can't see it very clearly anymore. Sometimes you need to show it to someone else to be able to get more perspective. Of course, it can be heavy and time-consuming to make a book with many layers. Sometimes, it's also nice to make a simpler book. We like variety. For example, we recently published Thomas Locke Hobbs's *Rampitas* (2024). It's a small leporello that contains a typology of concrete ramps in Medellín, Colombia. In the poorer regions of the city that lie against the mountain, people need to wheel their bikes home at night, so they build small concrete ramps on the stairs in these neighborhoods. It's a kind of folky brutalism. The ramps become like abstract sculptures, but as structures, they also say a lot about the social and physical challenges of these people, who need to go up and down this mountain every day.

AS: **And physically, the accordion-like leporello design references the stairs and ramps. Perhaps when the author's creative approach is relatively straightforward, it allows you as designers more freedom in terms of playing with the book's physicality?**

RVH: Definitely, although *Rampitas* might not be the best example because Thomas actually made an early dummy himself—a leporello that used blue tape to hold the images together. We liked it so much that we simply mimicked his dummy. Sometimes design is about recognizing good ideas that already work and then implementing them.

AS: **Do you prefer artists to approach you with a dummy or design idea in mind? Or do you prefer a messy pile of material?**

RVH: To be honest, we prefer a messy pile of material. Today, we see many photographers making dummies, but the difficult thing about only seeing an artist's dummy is that it sometimes feels like a fixed form. We don't know about the process that went into it, what was edited out, or how the photographer made decisions. When we're confronted with an almost finished object, all we can really say is yes or no. So we prefer to receive images, ideally accompanied by a text that explains the project and why the author thinks it could be a meaningful book.

AS: **With most of your books, only one of you carries the design credit.**

RVH: Yes, we share ownership of the publishing house, but we're both independent designers who have our own design companies. With every project, we decide quite naturally who's going to design it.

CF: Usually one of us is more enthusiastic about a project and feels it fits them nicely. We're very different designers. Rob is more of an intuitive designer; I'm more of an analytical designer.

RVH: I would say that I'm the more emotional designer, and Carel is the more rational designer. But, of course, with each design, we discuss our progress with each other, challenge one another, give feedback, and reflect on each other's work.

CF: We share a studio space, so we talk about the books a lot. It's always collaborative, but one designer definitely takes the lead.

AS: **What's an example of a "Rob book" versus a "Carel book"?**

RVH: Stéphanie Roland's *Isle of Seven Cities* (2024) centers around this idea of phantom islands. It's a fictional book and very cinematic, so design-wise it was about getting a strong sequential flow and a cinematic feel to the book. This would be a typical project that I might do.

CF: Crystal Bennes's *Klara and the Bomb* (2022) is more my kind of book. It's based on the history of, invention of, and interconnection between atomic bombs and computers, and focuses especially on the role women played in their development. It's a long research-based project, which includes a lot of text. It's probably one of the first books we published where the texts may be more important than the images.

AS: **How has your approach to design shifted in fourteen years?**

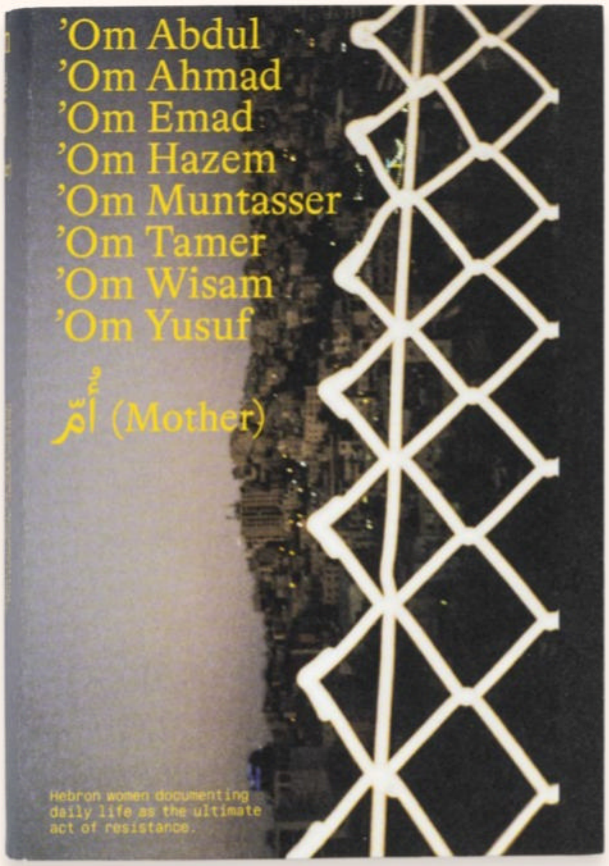
RVH: The challenge is to avoid routine. We've published around 135 books—it's like designing a chair again and again. How do we keep it fresh?

CF: Because book production is increasingly expensive and budgets are tighter, we're forced to be more radical in our design decisions now. I think this can lead to better books, because you need to strip down to the essence of what a project is about and feed that into the design.

We recently published *'Om (Mother)* (2024), by Barbara Debeuckelaere. Most of the images are taken by Palestinian mothers—women from eight Palestinian families. The project was initiated just before the war began in Gaza, so there was a sense of urgency to publish, but we didn't have much of a budget. So we made it small. It has a wraparound cover, and it uses paper effectively. We fit seventy-two pages onto each printing sheet rather than the usual sixty-four. In these ways, we kept the production costs very low and made it quickly, and it was shortlisted for the Paris Photo–Aperture PhotoBook Awards.

Opposite:
Spread from Daniel Chatard, *Niemandsland* (2024)

This page:
Cover of Barbara Debeuckelaere, *'Om (Mother)* (2024)



AS: **What do you anticipate will change in the art- and photobook publishing industry in the coming years?**

RVH: More books are being published than ever, but I don't think readership has grown significantly. This means that every publisher is selling lower quantities, and there's more competition. Also, the prices of materials, energy, and transport are increasing. Publishers are finding ways to handle this—some are connected to printing houses, some are connected to galleries, some have side jobs. Of course, you can also reduce the quality of the books. For some types of books that's okay, but this isn't how we want to work. There are also fewer printers now, and the ones that are still around are bigger and sometimes have a kind of monopoly. And lastly, the people working on presses are usually older guys who'll retire in ten years. That's a big concern—the loss of that knowledge.

CF: I think that within five years, we will have very different digital printing processes and presses, which will become cheaper to work with. The quality of digital printing is already almost on par with offset, and there's the potential that it will become even better. The challenge is to stay open to change.

AS: **Where do you draw wider inspiration from?**

RVH: I like hiking. When I walk in nature, I feel a sense of calmness, purity, and honesty. I want to bring that sense of purity and honesty into our books.

CF: I'm drawn to secondhand books, especially ones that are extremely niche. One example is a small booklet that I found for one euro at an outdoor bookstall. It has black-and-white photos and reviews of every meatball sandwich in Rotterdam. On the last page, there are just the words, "Every meatball sandwich is fantastic, so I cannot rate them."

Aaron Schuman is a writer and photographer based in the United Kingdom.

Basalt

The Factory

On the outskirts of Tokyo, a sprawling compound centers art books in everyday life.

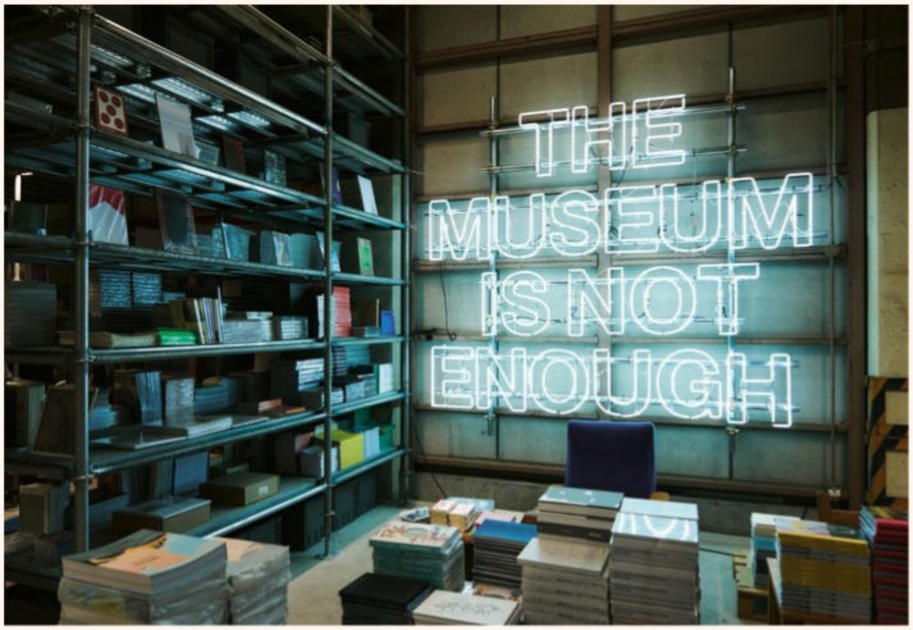
Marigold Warner

"This is not a bookshop," Atsushi Hamanaka told me recently, as he stood between thousands of books that line the dramatic scaffolding structure of a new multipurpose art center in Kameari, on the outskirts of east Tokyo. Hamanaka is the founder of Twelvebooks, a distributor that recently moved its entire operations, including around eighty thousand books, into this new warehouse. Visitors can purchase books here, but that isn't the primary aim. It is more akin to a library or a factory floor, with staff zipping around to check stock or package up the latest order.

"Our main intention is to use this space as a warehouse, but we organized it in a way that accommodates visitors," said Hamanaka. "Art books are often thought of as 'nonessential' or 'niche items for enthusiasts.' I want to overturn that perception. I want art books to be seen as part of everyday life—something anyone can pick up and engage with."

Alongside a record store and café, Twelvebooks forms the centerpiece of SKWAT, a project initiated by Keisuke Nakamura of the design agency Daikei Mills. The agency has been transforming disused buildings into creative spaces since 2019—most recently in Aoyama, a neighborhood known for high fashion and art.

Of all the places to set up shop in Tokyo, Kameari is an offbeat choice. It is a distinctly ordinary neighborhood located in the farthest reaches of the JR Jōban Line, almost an hour away from its previous location in Aoyama, west Tokyo. The SKWAT Kameari Art Centre, abbreviated to SKAC, occupies a tunnel-like space underneath the train tracks. Long and tall, it is both dramatic and inviting. Inside is a mix of concrete, metal, and wood, with beams of white LEDs that light up the scaffolding. Books are everywhere—in rows, piles, and glass cabinets that display rare and limited editions.



Atsushi Hamanaka and the SKWAT Kameari Art Centre, Tokyo, 2025
Photographs by Tetsuo Kashiwada for *Aperture*

Two giant rolls of Bubble Wrap hang from the scaffold; a set of metal stairs leads to a second balcony with even more books. Designer chairs are dotted around the space, creating cozy spots to browse in comfort.

But would people come all this way for books, records, and a cup of coffee? The short answer is yes. Since opening in November 2024, SKAC has seen an average of a hundred visitors on weekdays, and three hundred on weekends. Until now, the majority of art bookstores stocking international titles—from titans such as Tsutaya to independents including POST, Commune, and SO Books—were almost exclusively clustered in west Tokyo. As such, Twelvebooks's new location is an anomaly. It's a risk that has, so far, paid off.

Twelvebooks is an exclusive Japanese distributor for many international publishers, including Aperture, employing around twenty staff who work from the Kameari location. This is a big leap from its humble beginnings as a one-person operation. Hamanaka initially started out in fashion in the aughts as a photographer's assistant, but he quickly realized he wasn't suited to technicalities. "I loved photographs, but I wasn't interested in cameras," he explained. "I was more foc-used on the visuals, and how to tell a story."

Pivoting to editorial, he went on to work in Paris as an assistant in the upper echelons of the fashion world. All the while, he was consumed by collecting art books from cult shops such as Ofr and Yvon Lambert. "In the publishing world, the only jobs I understood were at publishers or bookshops. When I learned there was a job called distribution, I thought it could fit me well," he said. Now, his business celebrates its fifteenth year, with the warehouse an embodiment of Hamanaka's distinct taste, outlook, and passion.

Occasionally, the clanks of the overhead train line interrupt our conversation, a brief reminder of the temporality that sits at the heart of SKWAT's ethos. At the back of the warehouse is a huge LED sign: "The museum is not enough." The installation was made in 2019 as part of a collaborative project with the Canadian Centre for Architecture that explored the need for better arts education. It encapsulates Hamanaka's mission to reimagine how art books can exist among the everyday. This once-empty tunnel is so much more than a bookshop—it's a multifaceted, experiential space that challenges traditional ideas of how and where we interact with art.

Marigold Warner is a writer based in Tokyo.

COLOS

Graphic Content

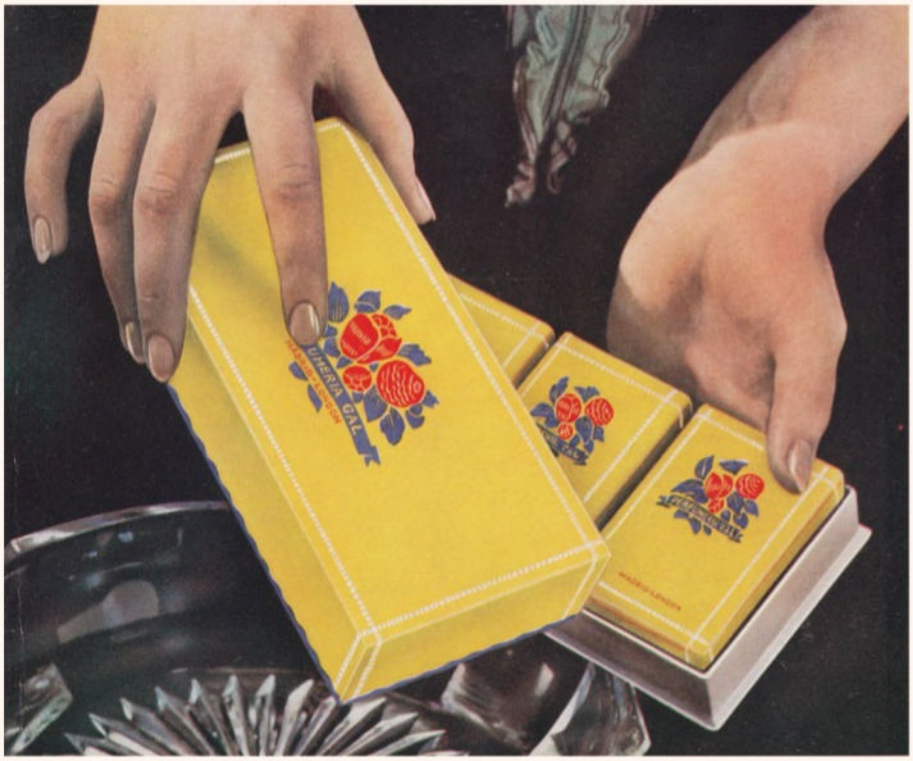
The New Typography movement revolutionized the relationship between image and text. A century later, its impact is still rippling.

Christopher Hawthorne

This page:
Press advertisement illustration for Gal soap, 1929
Courtesy New York Public Library

Opposite, left:
László Moholy-Nagy, Cover of *Die neue Linie*, September 1929
© Estate of László Moholy-Nagy/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Opposite, right:
El Lissitzky, *Pelikan Tinte*, 1924
© Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

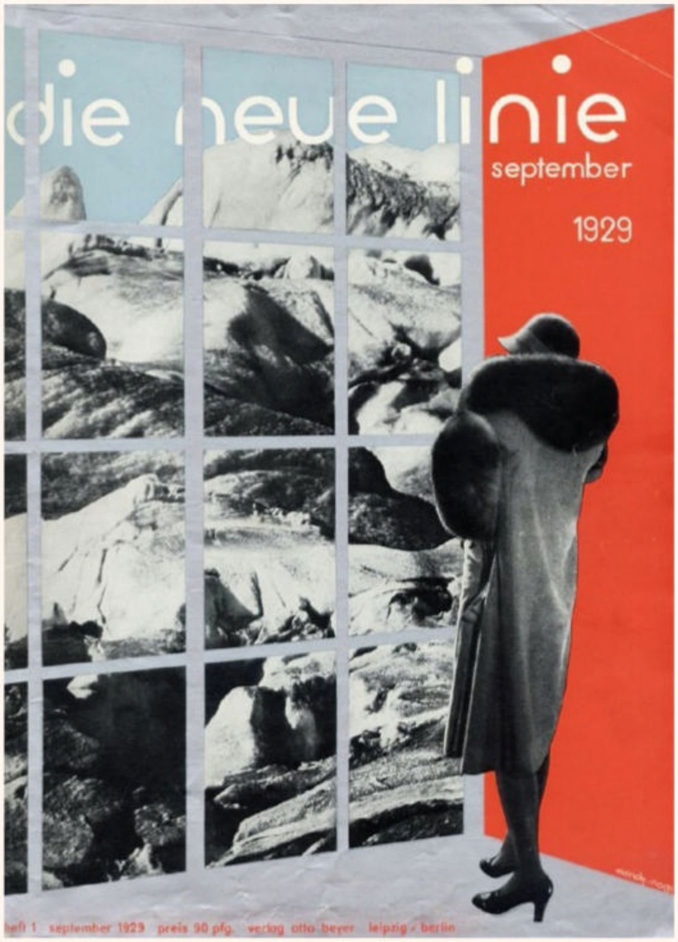


Just about a hundred years ago, ambitious graphic designers in Germany began incorporating photographic halftones, manipulated to one degree or another, into their advertising work for newspapers and magazines. And because they were ambitious graphic designers in interwar Germany, which is to say members of the Weimar intelligentsia, many of them almost immediately started theorizing this combination of text and image, generating a critical debate nearly as wide-ranging and multifaceted as the nascent design technique itself.

This new hybrid genre, elastic enough to connect experimental movements such as Dada on the one hand with print ads for bar soap on the other, was dubbed "typophoto" in 1925 by the Hungarian photographer, painter, and Bauhaus pedagogue László Moholy-Nagy. It was further explored, as part of the modernist movement New Typography, by the German typographer Jan Tschichold, who came to experimental graphic design by way of training in calligraphy. Now the phenomenon is the subject of ***Typophoto: New Typography and the Reinvention of Photography*** **(University of Minnesota, 2025; 288 pages, $30)**, a thorough if rather cautious new book by Jessica D. Brier, curator of photography at Vassar College's Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center.

If Brier never quite defines typophoto with finality—the concept keeps squirming about, wormlike, on the page—that is partly by design. The creative category appeals to her precisely for its elusiveness and malleability, what she calls its "layered meanings." She writes admiringly of the "persistent strangeness" of the halftone in this period—an unsettled quality that photographers and designers realized they could manipulate at will, making the halftone's matrix of dots more legible or less legible on the page. Mixing the halftone with experimental graphic design and the imperatives of advertising, Brier writes, energized and destabilized both categories.

The book's tidiest description of typophoto's emergence comes from the Russian artist El Lissitzky and the Dutch architect and designer Mart Stam, who wrote, in a joint contribution to a 1925 journal edited by Tschichold, that two inviolable mandates governed print advertising: "The product must be mentioned" and "the product must be shown." In nineteenth-century advertising, that meant some combination of text and illustration; in the 1920s and 1930s, it increasingly meant text and photography (or photomontage). For


die neue linie
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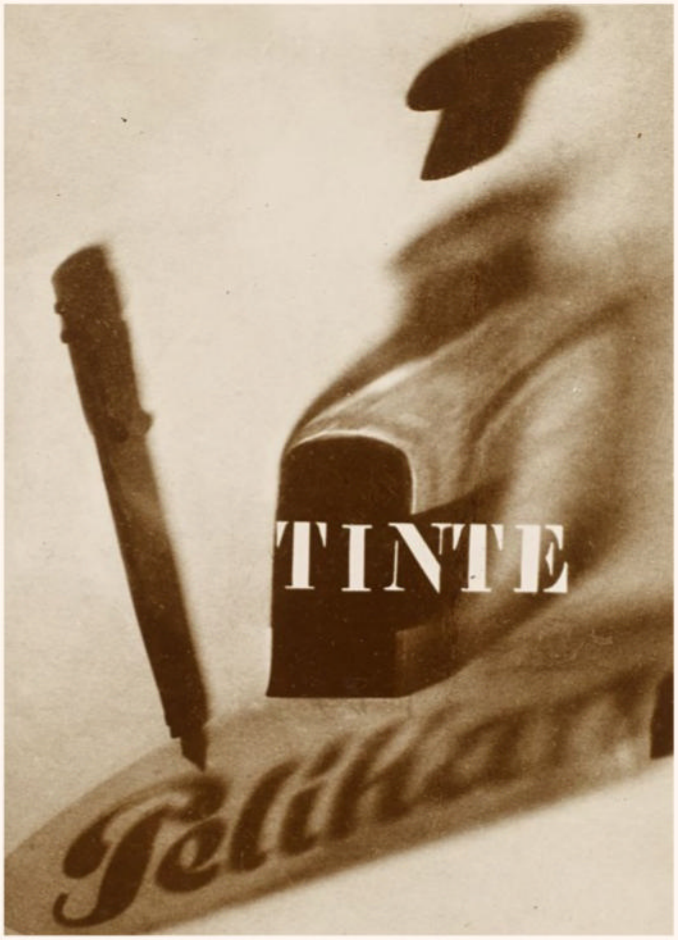
heft 1 september 1929 preis 90 pfg. verlag otto beyer leipzig · berlin



Brier, the ad business operated between the wars "as a surreal endgame for the hybridization of photography and type."

The New Typography—characterized by, among other elements, sans serif letterforms and aggressive asymmetry, with clear affinities to modernist architecture—was the subject of a 2009 exhibition at New York's Museum of Modern Art featuring material from Tschichold's own collection. Brier's focus is narrower, analyzing New Typography principally for the way it used, and changed, photography. (It helped photographers understand, for example, that the easiest way for them to reach a mass audience was to forge an alliance, however uncomfortable at first, with graphic design and the worlds of media and advertising, given the halftone's remarkable flexibility as a medium and, importantly, its ability to travel to far more places, far more quickly, than a traditional photographic print ever could.) Along the way, she offers fascinating detours on the psychology of advertising and the history of airbrushing.

Brier's book is content to be almost wholly a hermetically sealed historical study, confined, with few exceptions, to the 1920s and 1930s and faithful throughout to the creaky, risk-averse conventions of academic writing. I was left wanting to hear more about Moholy-Nagy and Tschichold as the radical and politically targeted figures they were (rather than narrative cutouts, stiff stand-ins for theories of design) and the polymathic creative circles in which they traveled. Why would the Nazis see Tschichold, a young graphic designer and teacher with a limited following, as enough of a threat to arrest him in 1933? Likewise for the way artists after the war, including Roy Lichtenstein and Sigmar Polke, further experimented with halftones (or painterly versions of them), making dots not only visible but in some ways a central subject of their canvases. As Polke memorably put it in 1966, in a bizarrely great quote Brier saves for the epilogue: "I love all dots. I am married to many of them. I want all dots to be happy. Dots are my brothers. I am a dot myself."

What might have been the lively center of the book is touched on only indirectly: the echoes of 1930s debates over typophoto that can be clearly heard in today's lamentations about the dangers to the cultural order posed by TikTok, Instagram, and other social-media platforms, which alluringly and algorithmically mix text, photographs, and video in ways directly reminiscent of the work of Brier's protagonists. These hybrids are morphing and reconstituting themselves too quickly to be fully made sense of by design critics or social scientists, to say nothing of the lawmakers who cluelessly quizzed TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew in congressional hearings two years ago.

Without bringing up present-day anxieties about the dangers of an image-dominated culture, or even nodding in their direction, Brier quotes the cultural critic Edlef Köppen, who, like many German writers of the era, understood the rise of photo-based media and related declines in attention spans—in time spent *looking* as opposed to *reading*—as a dire trend. Here's Köppen in 1925: "The mark of our age is haste, hurry, nervousness. People have no time, indeed they flee the calm of contemplation. . . . The rhythm of life pounds short and hard: further—further! The consequence in many respects is superficiality."

Sound familiar?

Christopher Hawthorne is a senior critic at the Yale School of Architecture.

Reviews

Christina's World.

Spread from Mike Brodie, *Failing* (Twin Palms, 2024)

Mike Brodie

Mike Brodie's life reads like young adult fiction—a dark, bruised version of the classic tale of the boy who leaves home to find himself and his place in the world. Starting in 2003, and for many years thereafter, he was a self-proclaimed hobo, hopping freight trains across the United States with other runaways and lost souls, making hundreds of Polaroids along the way. At some point he began carrying a Nikon, but he remained a passionate amateur, and his work had the grit, wit, and restless, careless intensity of an outsider artist. If he had influences and forebears (Larry Clark, Danny Lyon, Jim Goldberg, and Mark Cohen for starters), Brodie blasted right past them all by shrugging off style and focusing on what was right in front of him: the marvelous, fucked-up particulars of life as it unraveled day by day.

A Period of Juvenile Prosperity, Brodie's first book, was a revelation, a bombshell, as sophisticated as it was spontaneous, and one of the best photobooks of 2013. At the time, Brodie wasn't a complete unknown. He'd already begun showing his Polaroids in galleries; critics had their eye on him. But *A Period of Juvenile Prosperity*, made largely with that Nikon, opened the work up to a new sort of drama and incident. He was making film stills, not snapshots, but he hadn't lost any of the earlier work's authenticity or gut-punch power. The outsider was an insider in the world he was recording, and his subjects shared the space with him in a way that felt intimate, if provisional. Nothing was solid, nothing lasting, but each moment had weight and poignance if you only stopped to look.

Not long after *A Period of Juvenile Prosperity* was published, Brodie put the camera aside, became a diesel mechanic, got married, and settled down. His big new book, ***Failing* (Twin Palms, 2024; 412 pages, $85)**, is a jagged narrative, spiked with bits and pieces of that new life and its dissolution. Inevitably, perhaps, the work is less exciting, more contemplative and brooding. Any glimmers of hope that spark the opening section are quickly snuffed out. An undated picture, *Building our home*, shows only a bare wooden frame on a desert lot. We never see the finished house, and, little by little, death and drugs begin to weigh everything down. As the book's title suggests, Brodie is more frankly autobiographical here. In one sequence, he shows us *My hand* (grimy from work), *My spoon* (twisted and burned from use), and *My dick* (erect in the steering wheel of a car). Double-page spreads crop up to show scenes of decay and destruction and roads that suggest dead ends, not exhilarating escape. Still, the book's relentlessness feels somehow redemptive, cathartic. It opens with what reads, in a biblical typeface, like a brief sermon that closes ambiguously: "The Darkness within darkness, / The gate to all mystery." It ends with another spread of a wide-open road, only this time I'd like to think it was a way out. —**Vince Aletti**

Lele Saveri

For the past decade, Lele Saveri has captured the people, places, and moments around him, photographing daily on both film and his iPhone. Then, with each full moon (every "29 days, 12 hours, 44 minutes, and 2.5 seconds," as he precisely notes in the introduction to his book), he assembles a zine from the past month's images, xeroxes twenty to thirty copies, and hands them out to friends and family.

***Luna 10 Years* (Dashwood Books, 2025; 440 pages, $72)** coincides with an exhibition of the same name at Manhattan's Dashwood Projects and loosely chronicles the last ten years of Saveri's ritualized zine making, which is still ongoing. It's a large, floppy softcover—unpretentious and DIY, like the publications it reproduces at scale. The thin, uncoated pages feel almost xeroxed themselves. While each cover of the 124 zines is represented, their pages aren't reproduced in full. Instead, the sequence unfolds as if you're flipping through each zine, picking it up, skimming a few spreads, moving on. The photographs narrate his movements through New York, his travels, his friends and family, and, more recently, his work as an EMT. The book loosely traces Saveri's preoccupation with the ways we communicate in public space—with a particular attunement to street signs, graffiti, protest banners, and advertisements—while more intimate moments, such as friends gathering to

Cover of Lele Saveri, *Luna 10 Years* (Dashwood Books, 2025)

This page:
Spread from Joaquim Paiva, *Estas Figuras de Tempos e Sonhos* (These Figures of Times and Dreams) ({Lp} Press, 2024)

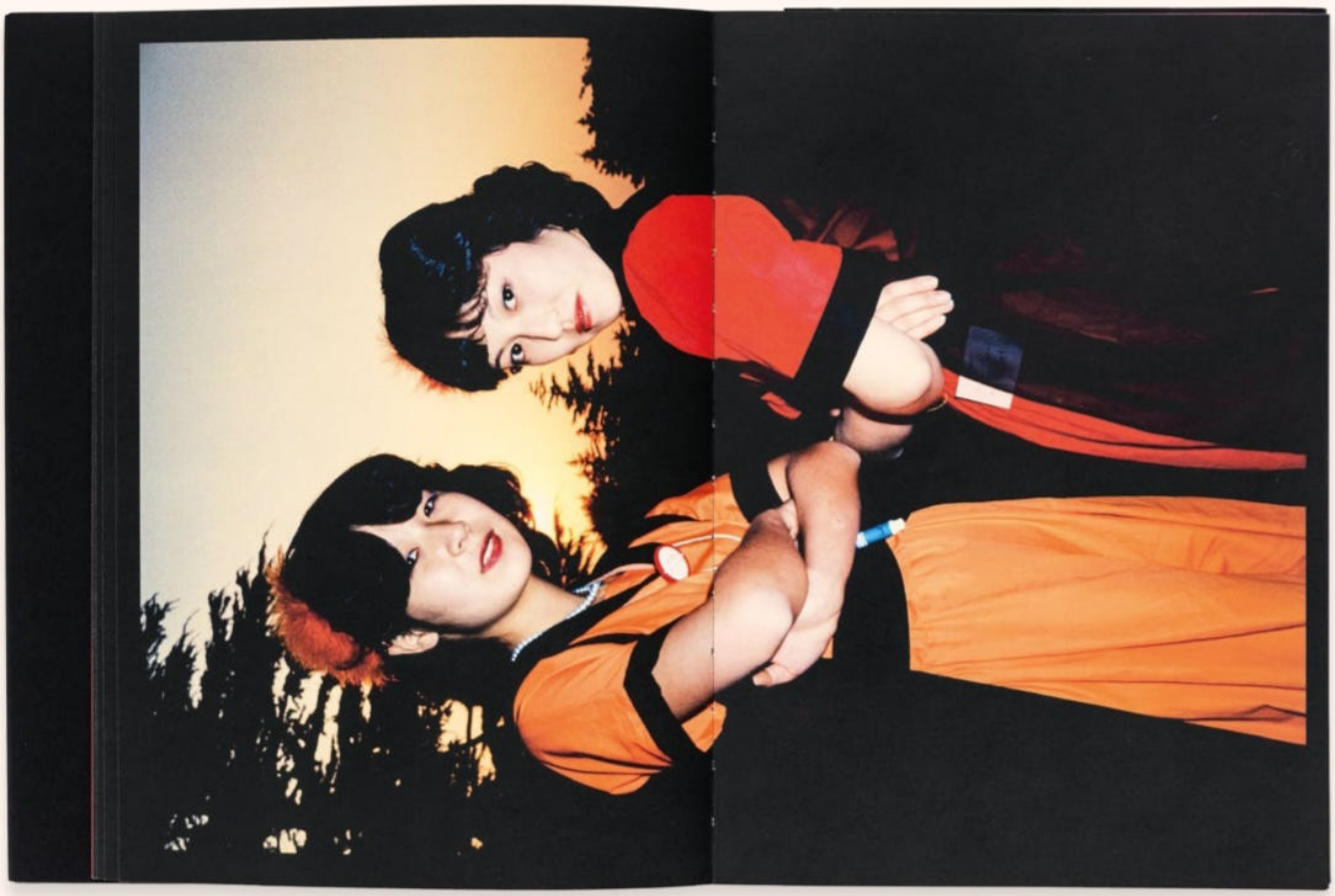
Opposite:
Spread from Noriko Shibuya, *Takenokozoku* (Area Books, 2024)

view the eclipse, remind us that these zines are, above all, visual diaries of Saveri's life. *Luna 10 Years* is both a time capsule and a meditation on the act of recording: a decade of aimless *dérive*, bound together by ritual, memory, and the rhythms of the moon. —**Noa Lin**

Joaquim Paiva

The bald man who stares hard at us from behind his sunglasses on the silver, shimmering cover of Joaquim Paiva's ***Estas Figuras de Tempos e Sonhos* (These Figures of Times and Dreams) ({Lp} Press, 2024; 432 pages, $45)** is full of himself, or could be. He is the center of all attention, the author, the authority, master of an attitude, the lonely star of his own galaxy. A Brazilian artist, collector, and diplomat who has amassed an impressive photographic archive over the past few decades in Rio de Janeiro and across the world, Paiva here puts himself, his memories and dreams, painful or bursting with life, on display.

Life has the winning hand in this game. The book splices spontaneous, banal, and glamorous moments together in all the vertiginous danger and glory of standing naked in the middle of a crowd. There is more than a handful of nude men interspersed among the pages, some beautiful, some ugly. They hide their anatomy behind phallic flowers, or skimpy swim attire. A queer sensibility pumps and throbs through all the veins of this visual odyssey, a journey that is dark and bright at the same time, running parallel to the advance and retreat of desires that often dwindle into quiet cul-de-sacs. Like the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa—whose verse inspired the book's title, and who wrote under approximately seventy other names—Paiva is something of a shapeshifter. In these glowing pages, whose paper alternates between glossy and stripped-down matte, the silvery explosiveness of the photographic grain screaming



all throughout, we glimpse friendly get-togethers, lovers long lost and new, open seas and complex cityscapes, a dive down deep that also, somehow, feels like a breath of fresh air. —**Silas Martí**

Noriko Shibuya

Every generation believes it invented being young. For as long as the camera has been readily available, the compulsion to document youth culture can be located in almost every era. ***Noriko Shibuya: Takenokozoku*** **(Area Books, 2024; 116 pages, $50)** captures one such window, between 1979 and 1982. The book borrows its title from a trend where, on Sundays, thousands of people would gather in the streets of Harajuku to listen to music, dance, and otherwise flaunt themselves. The first woman to break into Japan's independent photography gallery Camp, Shibuya celebrates this exuberance through colorful, off-the-cuff street portraits, close-ups of clothing and accessories, and wide shots of the onlookers and tourists who arrived in droves to watch the spectacle.

The slim, unfussy book includes a short explanatory text written by Shibuya and the Camp cofounder Daido Moriyama (and translated by Lucy Fleming-Brown), which provides background for this so-called rock 'n' rollers scene. While viewers can't hear the disco tracks blaring from the boom boxes or see the choreographed movements in the still images, period-specific details shine through in candid moments, such as pink dye being applied to a young woman's feathered hair, and in the dancers' fashion, including harem pants that helped define their funky style.

Despite the presence of these dated fads, Shibuya's vibrant photographs feel as if they could have been taken today. In one snapshot, a woman blows cigarette smoke and gazes irreverently at the camera. In another, a young man unselfconsciously applies eye shadow. At night, two friends giggle and grin in synchronized step. Even the vertical layout of the book, which requires the reader to flip the pages from bottom to top, unexpectedly mimics the motion of scrolling on social media. *Takenokozoku* reminds us, no matter our age, that while youth may be fleeting, its spirit is timeless. —**Mimi Wong**

Endnote
Durga Chew-Bose

Durga Chew-Bose is practiced in the art of heeding small things. A writer, editor, and filmmaker, her essays linger over gestures, memories, and daydreams, modeling a restless curiosity about the nuances of the human condition. Here, the Montreal native talks about her directorial debut, an adaptation of *Bonjour Tristesse*, Françoise Sagan's bittersweet 1954 tale of hedonism and heartbreak on the Côte d'Azur.

Durga Chew-Bose, Aliocha Schneider and Lily McInerny on the set of *Bonjour Tristesse*, Port d'Alon, France, 2023
Photograph © Thaïs Despont

When did you first read *Bonjour Tristesse*? Did it strike a chord with you then?
I can't remember when I first encountered *Bonjour Tristesse*, but it wasn't one of those books for me, the kind that changes your insides. I think it was a sweet escape at the time. (And escape holds plenty of value!) Of course, since rereading it nearly ten years ago, when this project started, my relationship to the book has changed. It holds the key to a lot. In some ways, it's a very simple story with a very complicated heart. In that way, it continues to grow on me and provides new points of entry. It's always been a book with some of my favorite themes: father-daughter relationships, women influencing women, summer doom.

What was the transition to directing like, having already spent so much time with the project as the screenwriter?
One advantage I had in this process was that there was no proof of concept. I've never done it before. The unknown was energizing. It didn't present itself as an obstacle to me. The major difference between writing and directing is it's a massive collaboration, with so many brilliant artists. It didn't feel hard to switch, to wear a different hat, because I didn't feel like people were asking me to wear another hat. They were actually saying, "Stay as you are, we will support who you are in this new playground."

Were there visual references you showed the cast and crew to help communicate a certain vision?
Bonjour Tristesse already has this sort of lore, and films set in the South of France are also their own category of cinema. While I wanted to honor that, it was important to me that we found a new way in. We looked a lot at Luigi Ghirri photographs, and considered a kind of sandy-blue color, how evocative it is.

Tell me about location scouting—those early steps in the filmmaking process where it's just starting to exist visually, where you can start to picture those moments.
The villa that we found was discreet. It wasn't as grand as I think people expect for this movie. It lives in harmony with the pines—there's this three-hundred-year-old pine that the villa is built around. There's a very inside-outside feeling that my cinematographer and I were immediately getting ideas from. It had all these little details, doorways and windows that you could look through, where you could see across the terrace. You could really be a voyeur. That spoke to me.

Did you have any photographers on set?
We had Jessica Forde, who is incredible, shooting production stills, and our second AD, Thaïs Despont, made some BTS images. But I was insistent on also bringing in a photographer who doesn't only do behind-the-scenes. My producers were able to find a way to have Estelle Hanania on set. I love her work. It's a little eerie—her sensibility is almost like found photographs. Her pictures are this strange mixture of behind-the-scenes and then this heightened other film that's being made alongside it.

Making a movie seems like a natural progression for you since your writing is so clearly informed by the language of film.
Filmmakers taught me how to see, and taught me how to express myself, and taught me how to have a voice. I think it was always a part of my expression, even if I hadn't expressed it yet.

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